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POPULAR DETECTIVE

MAY 1949

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

POPULAR DETECTIVE

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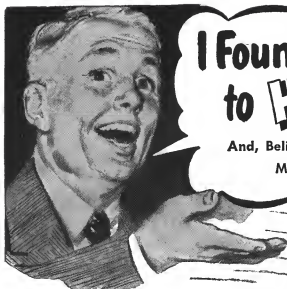
Homicide HANDICAP

*A Keene Madden
Novelet*

By STEWART STERLING

THE MAYOR IS DEAD

A Crime Novelet
By B. J. BENSON

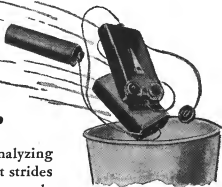


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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXVI, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

MAY, 1949

FEATURED NOVELET



Homicide Handicap

by Stewart Sterling

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POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, \$1.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright 1949 by Better Publications, Inc. In communicating with this magazine, please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Printed in U.S.A.

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A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

PETE HAMLIN locked the door of his room, settled in his chair, picked up his pencil. For a long time he just sat and dawdled, trying to figure out who would want to kill him. That someone was trying to kill him was obvious.

But who?

There were plenty of people who would murder for a million dollars, he knew. And at least a million was in the pot.

Earlier that day, out on the salt flats, Pete Hamlin had driven his new diesel-powered automobile at 132 miles an hour—a speed test that had almost ended in his death. That fast car was almost certain to revolutionize the automobile industry, and whoever had sabotaged one of his tires, Pete knew, so that his test ended in a smash-up, was out to grab control of the priceless fuel pump that was the secret of the car's success.

A Treacherous Trick

Pete Hamlin went over the names of possible suspects. First on the list was his estranged wife, Sheila. Sheila had just shown up in the company of an unsavory character named Rutledge.

Having heard that Pete was about to make a fortune, she had brazenly asked for fifty thousand dollars as the price of a divorce, distracting Pete's attention while someone snooped around in his room for the pump plans. In a rage at discovering her trick, Pete had ordered her from his place, telling her he would kill her if she ever tried to lay a hand on his pump plans again.

Sam . . . Mike . . . Steve . . . Bob—these were the men who worked with Pete. But none of them would gain anything by wrecking the test schedule or killing him, Pete knew. In fact, they'd each of them lose, for their futures were all bound into the success of the car. The more he thought about it, the more his mind seemed to dissolve into

hopeless confusion.

Little by little, the tenseness inside Pete Hamlin ebbed away and he became absorbed in putting the final pump plans on paper. Then, finally, they were done. With a grunt of satisfaction, he threw down his pencil and looked at his watch. It was a quarter to nine.

He folded the plans, put them in an envelope, addressed it to his lawyers in Washington. The post office was closed now, but he had a friend in town, someone he could trust implicitly. Once he had the envelope in his friend's safe, the design would be safe.

The Stolen Weapon

Pete started for the door, paused briefly at the window. The road to town wound over flat ground and there was hardly a bush along the way to give cover to anyone who might be lying in wait. But, nevertheless, he went over to the bed and reached under the pillow for his gun.

He stiffened, ran his hand back and forth along the sheet, then jerked the pillow aside. The big .45 was gone!

A curious, crawling sensation traveled along Pete's shoulder blades. That man who had broken into his room before—had he been after the gun and not the plans or the pump? A sudden chill went through him. There was only thing to do. Keep off the road as he headed into town.

He set his course to come around the back of a nearby church. Somewhere under the cold, star filled sky, a dog was howling. He approached the church and the howling of the dog was closer. He could see it now, over near one of the tombstones, sitting on its haunches, baying at the moon. Pete froze as he caught a glimpse of something white lying on the ground. Then he moved into action, running.

The patch of white began to take shape. A sick feeling hit Pete in the pit of his

stomach. It was a body—the body of a woman!

His shoe kicked something metallic. He stopped short, looked down. The metal glinted in the moonlight. It was a gun, a .45 automatic—his own gun.

Pete started to pick it up, changed his mind, pushed on, a horrible roaring in his ears.

His eyes blurred. That body couldn't be what he thought.

On the Spot

He stumbled, fell to his knees, lifted himself painfully and looked into the body's dead face. His eyes slowly cleared and he could see the moonlight playing on its honey colored hair. There was blood around a small bullet-hole in its throat.

It was the woman he had threatened to kill earlier that day.

It was his wife—Sheila!

That's the kind of exciting action packed in the pages of the long novelet featured in the next issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE—MURDER ON FOUR WHEELS**, by William Degenhard.

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(Continued on page 98)



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HOMICIDE

HANDICAP

The odds are on murder when a battling private eye tackles a racetrack mystery — and must win his clues, place a killer and show the evidence!



A KEENE MADDEN NOVELET BY STEWART STERLING

CHAPTER I

Terrified Lady

THE fat bartender let the receiver dangle.

"For you, Mr. Madden." He wiggled to a lean young man at the far end of the bar.

"'Kew, Eddie."

Keene Madden's clipped brusqueness of speech was in curious contrast to the leisurely, almost languid, manner with which he set down his rum Collins and

The Slaying of Two Famous Jockeys Catapults

pushed himself away from the mahogany rail. An equally odd contradiction in the long-nosed, collie-dog seriousness of his saddle-leather features was the effect of smiling eyes, caused by deep crinkles at the corners, like those clockers get after years of squinting into the sun at the dawn works.

He sauntered into the booth with the loose, rolling gait of the horseman.

"Lo?"

"Johnny Cady, Mr. Madden." The voice at the other end was shrill with hysteria.

"Snew, Johnny?" The West Coast head of the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau lounged against the side of the booth.

"Them punk fix-bums is throwin' me up for grabs, that's what's new! All on account I try to make on the level, like you warn me! You gotta get me outa this jam, but I mean in a *rush*!"

"Name's Madden, Johnny. Not Houdini."

"Im not kidding! After you gimme that or else this noon, I do my stuff strictly on the up an' up. I give Lookaway a nice, snug ride in the seventh, an' never mind if Hoo-Hoo Lustani does cut over and crowd me to the rail in the stretch so I get a shinfal of splinters, still an' all I bat the filly in there for win money!"

"Kay. So?"

"So now them scufflers decide that because I go straight on 'em, I'm also li'ble to squawk on 'em, too! They're tryin' to fix my wagon so it won't squeak!"

"Makes you think so?"

The sudden fury in Cady's voice made the receiver vibrate. "Couple hours ago, I'm drivin' back from th' track, rackin' along Foothill about fifty, when my left front comes off, slams me across the road into a chicken truck. Somebody loosens the lugs on that wheel, Mr. Madden! Figurin' I'm gonna smack up an' kill myself. Which I mighty near do! I pile up with my puss halfway through the windshield!"

"Tell me a crack in the cranium like that sometimes brings on delirium, Johnny—sometimes starts a guy talking his head off," Keene observed caustically. "You feel like talking now, Johnny?"

"There was no comeback.

"Johnny!" Keene could tell the line was still open, but there was no answer.

"Johnny!!!"

The crinkles around Keene's eyes were supplemented by other, sharper, lines around his mouth. He jiggled the hook a few times before he hung up, went out of the booth, laid a bill on the bar.

"Anybody calls, ask 'em to leave a number, Eddie. . . ."

THE auto court fronted on a boulevard lined with leprous palms, shabby and dismal in the moonlight. But behind the high pink wall the night was heavy with the perfume of oranges.

In the headlights of Keene's convertible, the golden globes shone against the lush foliage like costume jewelry on a dowager's chest. He parked beside the darkened renting office, sniffing appreciatively. Johnny Cady'd come a long way from sleeping on feed sacks in stables to a snazzy bungalow like this. Maybe the jockey'd come too fast, though. Maybe he wouldn't be able to hold the pace.

Behind the screens of citrus a dozen cars were scattered around the semicircle of Spanish stucco bungalows, ghost-like under the green neon spelling out "No Vacancy." Lights filtered dimly through Venetian blinds of some of the cottages. Of Number Nine, among others.

As Keene came up to it, avoiding any crunch of gravel by walking on the grass, the lights inside Nine went out. He stepped swiftly into the pool of shadow at the side of the bungalow.

There was an open window. It was screened; the blind was down. Keene listened, but heard nothing except the tinny tinkle of a radio a couple of bungalows away. But he sensed movement behind him, ducked, and whirled.

His right hand flashed inside his coat to his left armpit. Instinctively he shoved out his free hand to ward off the vague blur coming at him through the gloom.

His fingers touched smooth satin over soft flesh. The girl who had backed into him spun around. She drew in her breath sharply, but the scream he expected didn't come.

He caught at her shoulder. She

Keene Madden into a Dead Heat with Destiny!

wrenched away. The top of her satin pajamas ripped.

"Let go!"

It was a whisper of terror. Stark fear was stamped on what he could see of her features—dark eyes wildly staring, full lips taut against small, even teeth, glossy hair cascading down over the pale oval of her face.

The impression was instantaneous but inescapable. This beautiful young thing was half scared to death!

"Kit easy," he said, and kept his own voice low.

"Someone—" she gasped—"will hear!"

She wasn't tall, and she was too slen-



KEENE MADDEN

der and willowy to be muscular. But she struggled with surprising strength. He had to use both hands to hold her. For a long breath there was a disturbing sensation of warm curves straining close against him. The top of her pajamas pulled off one shoulder.

"Body's going to hurt you, sister."

Her knee came up savagely, caught him in the stomach.

The blinding pain made him relax his grip for an instant. Long enough for her to tear loose, race barefooted across the lawn.

The panic-stricken figure in scarlet satin vanished among the mottled moon shadows beneath the orange trees.

He doubled up, gritting his teeth at nausea, wiping cold sweat from his face with his sleeve.

The tinny radio, and an occasional burst of laughter, were still the only sounds. But after a minute a slender wedge of light glistened briefly on the varnished woodwork of a station wagon across at the other end of the semicircle. The glint of reflected light lasted just long enough for someone to have opened the door of the bungalow behind the station wagon, and to have slipped inside.

He went around to Nine's veranda, called "Johnny!", tried the door without waiting for an answer. It was open.

Keene felt around the jamb, found the light switch inside.

There was no one in the living room. No sign of anyone, except on one of the low-slung chairs where, beside a pile of racing papers, lay a brown suede-and-corduroy jacket with a dark splotch on the left lapel and spattered stain spots above the left-side pocket.

He looked in the bedroom.

Johnny was there. On the floor, beside the bed. Crumpled on his side with one knee twisted up under him, as if he had been sitting on the edge of the studiobed and had blacked out, slumped to the carpet.

The jockey's eyes were open, but they weren't looking at anything. His mouth was open, too, but it was a little late for him to be saying anything.

The left side of his forehead was marked up with cuts and scratches. Dark streaks of dried reddish-brown slashed across the cheek-bone. His nose was swollen. The lead-gray lips were bruised and puffy. He looked like a pitifully battered boy of twelve, in his crumpled cream slacks and matching shirt.

A TOWEL that had been soaked in rubbing alcohol lay on the rug beside the little bedside table. The stub of a cigarette had burned itself out, leaving a charred spot on the chenille rug.

The handset of the pickup phone was lying across Johnny's left wrist, as if the jockey had suddenly collapsed while talking on the phone.

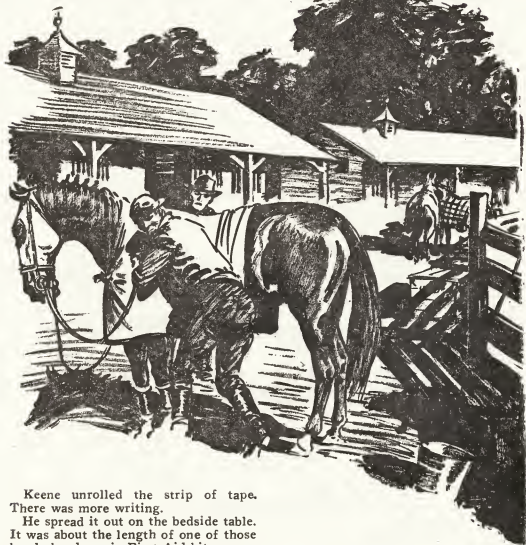
There was no indication of a weapon, of any attack. The marks on the dead jockey's face could very well have been

the result of a car smashup. The jockey hadn't checked into any hospital after the crash, or they would have cleaned him up, stuck adhesive tape over those cuts.

On the rug, beside the towel, there was one little scrap of surgeon's stickum. It had been wadded into a ball. A figure had been written on it—the figure 4.

He folded the tape, put it in his pocket.

When he went out, he left the lights on, in Nine.



Keene unrolled the strip of tape. There was more writing.

He spread it out on the bedside table. It was about the length of one of those handy bandages in First Aid kits—maybe half as wide. The lettering covered the whole strip:

S041—N71—G2—C

Keene turned it over. Stuck to the adhesive side, running diagonally across one end, was a single thread of scarlet silk.

What a way for the great Johnny Cady to check out, Keene told himself bitterly, as he cut through the orange grove toward that station wagon.

Johnny had come up the hard way, from the little half-mile bull rings at the whistle stops, where the gyp trainers

raced for feed-bill money, and the apprentice boys rode for peanuts, all the long, hard way up to the thundering tumult of the big apple and contract retainers with a cut on the fat purses.

A good, game kid who had been mashed against a thousand starting gates, been thrown and trampled in scores of those wild, driving come-from-behind finishes for which he had become famous at every track from Suffolk Downs to Tanforan. Johnny had come through all that with nothing more than a few fractures and a dozen months in the hospital, only to get it here, finally, like this—alone in a Southern California

that, though he had angry feelings about it. Grim, foreboding feelings. No possible doubt, for Keene had been an unwitting accessory before the fact.

He might have guessed that the tricky brains behind the fix-ring, the setup which had been scooping a hundred thousand a week out of the mutual handle at the biggest track on the Coast, wouldn't hesitate at any little thing like homicide to protect their fabulous take. Likely Johnny would be alive right now if Keene had been more careful about putting it up to the cocky little rider there in the jockey house enclosure this afternoon—if he had warned Johnny in the presence of other riders, instead of getting him off to one side and talking



"Strange as it may seem to a dumb gumshoe," said Sam, "I have a race on my mind"

auto court, instead of out in front of frenzied, cheering thousands where he had gambled with death so many times.

A dismal way to wind up—to be murdered. Keene had no illusions about

to him like a Dutch uncle.

Then the behind-the-scenes boy for the fixer—whoever he might be—wouldn't have had any reason to think Johnny was spilling. He hadn't been. He hadn't admitted a thing or implicated anybody, though he knew Keene had enough on him to bar him from the turf for life, maybe enough to put him behind bars for a stretch. Still, Johnny had kept his mouth shut, aside from a promise to ride clean from then on.

CHAPTER II

Too Many Husbands

HE bungalow behind the station wagon was Number Sixteen. It was dark now, though there had been a light in it when somebody had opened that door a few minutes ago.

Might not have been the girl, Keene admitted to himself. Could have been Joe Anybody, getting a breath of fresh air before turning in. The girl might be a mile away, by now.

Didn't seem reasonable, though. She had been wearing those slinky pajamas, had been barefooted. She would not go far without putting more clothes on.

He knuckled Sixteen's door. No reply. He banged again, louder.

Silence, in large hunks.

Queer. The station wagon was still here, in front of the bungalow. And there *had* been someone inside to open that door and throw that shaft of light on the car, even if it hadn't been Puss in Pajamas. Why didn't the occupant answer Keene's knock?

He went to the window opening onto the veranda, squatted to peer under the Venetian blind.

Behind him, a voice inquired bleakly: "Think you can crawl under there, punk?"

Keene straightened swiftly.

The man who had opened the bungalow door so noiselessly stood with one slipper over the threshold, one hand leveling a heavy-caliber automatic down by his hip, the thumb of the gun hand hooked into the pocket of his purple dressing gown to support the weapon's weight.

His head was too big for his small, skinny frame and scrawny neck. His face had the emaciated gauntness of an old man—the skin drawn tightly over thin cheek-bones, the eyes deep-sunk in sockets too closely set together. Only his nose was large, a jutting jib-boom of a nose sticking out from the gnome-like face like a varnished spar.

Keene bit off his words, crisply: "'Goes here, Hoo-Hoo? Hidin' from somebody?"

Nothing in the investigator's manner suggested that he had been ignorant of the fact that the country's top-ranking jockey was staying here at the same court where Johnny Cady had been holding up!

This wasn't the address Keene had, in his file, for Don "Hoo-Hoo" Lustani. Of course, the Bureau had no authority to compel any rider to notify it every time he felt like changing lodgings. Then, too, maybe Lustani'd had a reason for not wanting the shift known. A feminine reason.

The discovery suggested many possibilities, none of them in the nature of a coincidence. This Hoo-Hoo Lustani was widely recognized as a rough, tough customer, on and off the track.

Talk of bad blood between Hoo-Hoo and Johnny had been more than rumor. This afternoon's seventh wasn't the only race where the two had lashed out at each other with whips and fighting words.

Where did the girl fit in this picture? If Johnny and Hoo-Hoo had clashed over her, it might mean Cady had been killed in a quarrel, not murdered to keep him quiet!

Hoo-Hoo Lustani craned his neck around the corner of the door:

"You?" He took a step out onto the porch. "What in blazes *you* prowlin' aroun' my place for, this time of night, Madden?"

"Use your phone. Report an accident. Any objections?"

Hoo-Hoo kept his grip on the gun, but slid it into the pocket of his dressing gown.

"How you happen to pick out my bungalow to call from? Plenty others where the people're still up."

"'Sright. Could've used Johnny's phone. Only I didn't want to muck up any fingerprints might be on the receiver."

"Johnny?" Hoo-Hoo looked blank. "Cady?"

"Yair."

"Smatter with that bum?"

"Car was in a smashup," Keene noted that though Lustani wore pajamas under the dressing gown, his black hair as still smooth and slicked down as if it hadn't been near a pillow. "'Bout the phone?"

Hoo-Hoo moved aside, sullenly, switched on the light in the living-room.

"Is he hurt serious?"

"S serious, all right."

Keene couldn't see anything in the room to indicate the presence of a female, except that two highball glasses stood side by side on the mantel, with a half-inch of melted ice in the bottom of each. Of course it didn't necessarily mean that Hoo-Hoo's guest, if he'd had one, was a girl.

"Don't overdo it and act too unhappy, Hoo-Hoo," he advised. "He wasn't any friend of yours."

"Wasn't it?" The jockey's head swiveled toward the bedroom. "Is he dead?"

"As one of yesterday's tote tickets, yair."

Keene got to the bedroom door ahead of Hoo-Hoo, flung it open, clicked on the light.

NO ONE. No sign of anyone, either. Twin beds, one mussed up. *Racing Form* on the bedside table beside the phone. Fifth of bonded Bourbon, half-empty, beside the *Form*. No glasses. Cigarette stubs in the ash tray. Keene wasn't close enough to see if there were lipstick stains on any of them.

But the bathroom door was shut tight. "Listen!" Hoo-Hoo crowded in behind him, small eyes burning hotly. "Just because you wear one of them Protective Bureau badges don't give you any right to come bustin' through my place like you own th' joint!"

"Smatter, Hoo-Hoo? Something here you don't want anybody to see?"

The jockey's jaw stuck out pugnaciously. "Such as, f'r instance?"

Keene looked at the bathroom door. "Dame, maybe?"

"What's it to you, you horse's *hacienda*? Who gave you Bureau snooper-dupers any license to inquire into my private an' personal affairs, huh?"

"Johnny wasn't killed in any accident, Hoo-Hoo. He was murdered." Keene sat on the rumpled bed, reached for the phone. "Might have been murdered by a dame. Was one hanging around his bungalow few minutes ago. Saw her."

The jockey came close. "Lay off that phone, Madden! If you're gonna make trouble, don't ring me in on it! I don't want any pack of bloodhounds sniffin' around my place! Keep me out of it. Whistle for your dogs from somewheres else."

Keene put the transmitter to his

mouth, dialed Operator.

Hoo-Hoo snarled: "I said cut it!" He grabbed for the instrument.

Keene warded him off, with a stiff arm against the jockey's chest.

"Num-bah?" the operator said.

"Me through to the police, sister."

"What is your num-bah?" the distant voice said.

Keene bent over, glancing at the figures under the celluloid disk, snuggling the receiver against his shoulder to keep Lustani from grabbing it. "Foothill six two—"

"Look out!" came a scream from the bathroom door.

Keene slid off the bed on one knee, hunching forward, holding the phone over his head. Something smashed the phone, shattered against his head. His right hand, behind him, caught the cord of Hoo-Hoo's dressing gown.

Keene pivoted on his knee, hauling the jockey toward him. He hooked a hard left up from the floor, not particular about its landing inches low.

"Son of a dog!" The jockey slashed at Keene's face with the jagged neck of the broken bottle.

Keene rolled against the bed, grabbed the small, bony wrist, twisting. He chopped in another left, pulling Hoo-Hoo toward him to increase the force of the blow.

A bone snapped in Hoo-Hoo's wrist. He moaned, spat in Keene's face, dropped weakly to his knees beside the Protective Bureau man.

Keene let go of the wrist, put his weight into a solid right, coming up off his knee, as he let the punch go. Hoo-Hoo's head snapped back. His body sagged forward.

Keene caught him before he fell on his face in the broken glass.

He picked the jockey up, flung him onto the bed. Hoo-Hoo's head rolled limply, as if his neck had been broken.

"Don't!" The girl was screaming again, from the open door of the bathroom. "Don't hurt him any more!"

She ran out into the room. She was dressed now. Cool white skirt, tight-fitting aquamarine sweater, lizard sandals, strap-bag of the same leather. She was still frightened.

"Owe you one for that," Keene wiped his face, felt of the back of his head. Liquor had drenched his neck, but there was a cut, too. His fingers came away

red and sticky. "Sucker would have brained me sure, you hadn't yelled."

She came to the bed, took Hoo-Hoo's head in her hands, gently.

"It wasn't for your sake!" she cried. "I just didn't want him to kill you! He was trying to keep you from calling the police to arrest me!"

"Say he was."

"You didn't have to break his arm!"

"It'll heal, time for his trial."

She stared. "You can't think he killed Johnny!"

"He did. Or you did."

"No! No, no, NO! Hoo-Hoo didn't even know Johnny was dead, until I went over there to Nine. I know he didn't have anything to do with it!"

"How you know?"

SHE slid a pillow under Hoo-Hoo's head.

"I was—with him. With Hoo-Hoo, I mean. When Johnny was killed."

"When was that?"

Was she merely accepting his word for it that Johnny had been murdered, or did she actually know he had been murdered?

She frowned, irritated. "Don't try to trap me by any of those cute questions! All I know is that Hoo-Hoo and I saw some policeman bring Johnny back here in a patrol car—around seven-thirty, that was. Johnny was all right then. At least he got out of the car and went into his bungalow without any help. I was"—she hesitated—"I was right here with Hoo-Hoo every minute until I ran over to Johnny's bungalow about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Found him dead." Keene didn't make it a question. "That's the story?"

"It's the truth! He was lying there on the floor in his bedroom, with his eyes wide open, staring!" She shivered.

"Yair." Keene picked up the phone, put it to his ear. No dial tone. That smash with the bottle had put the instrument out of commission. "That'd have been around half-past eight?"

She looked at a diamond-crusted wrist-watch.

"Something like that, yes."

"Particular reason why you went over to Cady's, when you were being—um—entertained by Lustani?"

"Curiosity." She put down her bag, hurried into the bathroom, came back with a sopping towel. "I wanted to find

out why the police brought Johnny home."

"He one of your boy-friends, too?"

She wiped Hoo-Hoo's face and laid the wet towel on his forehead. She didn't look at Keene at all.

"I guess you meant that to be insulting. But I suppose you have a right to say things like that, after what you've seen of me tonight. Still, you're wrong about Johnny. I used to be his wife."

Keene tried to recall the dossier he had in his files on Johnny. There had been something about a divorce, a year or so ago. "Sorry if I spoke out of turn. Mrs. Cady, but—"

"Call me Enid. I'm not Mrs. Cady now. Aren't you going to call a doctor for Hoo-Hoo?"

Keene watched the jockey's breathing. "Going to ring the blues to come pick him up. You, too."

"You can't!" She sprang up, terrified.

"Want to bet?"

"Why must you tell them about—my being here! It'll simply ruin me! And it won't do a bit of good!"

"Have to let the buttons decide that, for themselves."

"I tell you I didn't have anything in the world to do with Johnny's getting killed!" Enid clutched his arm, coming close to him so that once more he felt the disconcerting pressure of her body against his.

"Nothing to me," he said tautly. "Murder's not my department. That's for cops."

What was it this girl had that was so powerfully disturbing, that gave such a strong sensation of nearness to even the most casual contact with her?

"I just happened in on this homicide while I was on another job," he said. "You save all that guff for the blues."

She dug her fingers into his forearm so it hurt. "But if you don't tell them about me, I won't have to!"

"No can help." He decided she wasn't making a play for him. The desperation etched in her face was too genuine for that. "I walk in on one stiff just after you've been visiting the scene of the crime. I trail you over here and your current boy-friend comes for me like crazy when I start to call Headquarters. If I scratched you from the list of likely suspects, I'd have to get my head examined."

Enid put her face up to his. "Would

you—let me go and leave me out of it, if—”

“No dice.” He shook his head.

“If I told you who did kill Johnny?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“Whether I believe you.”

Enid released his arm slowly, her eyes searching his.

“You can believe me, all right. Because what I’m going to tell you implicates me, too. The police will be questioning me, before they’re through. You can be sure of that.” She looked down at the jockey for an instant, her lips quivering. “Hoo-Hoo’ll tell you the same thing. The only man who’d have any reason to murder Johnny is—my husband.”

CHAPTER III

Blow in the Dark



KEENE mopped the blood off the back of his head with his handkerchief.

“Second husband?” he asked the girl, Enid.

“Yes.” Her eyes filmed; tears rolled down her cheeks. But her voice was steady. “I’m Mrs. Sam Kurtch.”

“—ly Cats!” Keene exclaimed. “Sammy? Austin Hoadley’s trainer?”

She nodded, still crying silently. “And Hoo-Hoo’s boss. Now tell me how terrible I am, to be playing around with one of my husband’s employees! And you’d be just as wrong as anyone ever could be, unless you understand the queer kind of individual Sam is.”

“You’re not falling for this hodelyo, are you?” Keene caught himself up sharply. “You’re not letting yourself be hypnotized into swallowing this stuff? You know all about Sammy Kurtch, as who in the thoroughbred game doesn’t? Suppose he does have some queer quirks to his character, still he’s one of the shrewdest trainers in the business—and one of the most respected. Nothing you’ve ever heard about Sammy would lead you to conclude he could murder a man, not even if that man was his wife’s former husband. Don’t let her think you’re buying that, brother!”

Keene said aloud: “Why would Sam want to kill Johnny, Mrs. Kurtch?”

“Enid.”

“Your way. Enid. Why?”

She spread her palms. “Sam knows I don’t love him. He thinks I still care for Johnny. I did, in a way, but not that way. Sam couldn’t believe that. He’s threatened a dozen times to put Johnny where I couldn’t ever see him again. Sam must have trailed me over to the auto court tonight, or had me trailed, and assumed I was—spending the evening with Johnny. If he thought that—well, I know Sam! He wouldn’t stop at anything!”

“Might not, case like that.”

Keene realized she’d called the turn on that. Sammy was the kind of gent who wouldn’t stop at anything, to get what he wanted. Ruthless was the word for Sammy, right enough.

“It’s screwy,” he reminded himself. “It’s cockeyed.” But if there was even an outside chance she might be right, it could be disastrous to tie her in with a mess like this.

An accusation that one of racing’s big-shot trainers had murdered a popular jockey would be smelly enough. But it would be worse if the murder had to be linked up to a scandal about a trainer’s wife and a jockey suspected of collusion with a ring that was rooking bettors out of half a million a month!

He thought: “That might really tear it, brother! That would destroy public confidence in the honesty of racing quicker’n you could say photo finish! Incidentally, that’s the thing you’re paid to protect, ma fren’—confidence in racing.”

He said: “You actually see Sammy over here at the auto court tonight, Enid?”

“No.”

“Just think he might’ve trailed you here?”

“I’m positive he was having me shadowed.” She wiped her eyes, defiantly. “But I thought I’d given the—operative, or whatever you call that kind of roach—the slip tonight. I took a bus from the track, got off at the next motel down the boulevard, Autopia, and walked back. I didn’t see anyone following me.”

Keene got a towel from the bathroom, washed the blood off his head.

“Make a deal with you.”

"What?"

"Wait till Hoo-Hoo snaps out of it. If he backs up your story, about you two being together all the time after Johnny was brought home until you went over and found him dead, then I'll leave it up to Hoo-Hoo. If he wants to sweat it out alone, without you to furnish an alibi for him, that'll be his hard luck."

She ran to him, her eyes shining, her glossy mane flying wildly. "That's marvelous!"

"Be too sure. I'm not guaranteeing to keep your name out of it. But I won't bring it in unless I have to." Keene sized up the unconscious figure on the bed. "Chum won't be up an' doing for a few minutes. I'll hop over to Nine and use the phone, meantime. Don't go 'way, or there'll be a short-wave alarm out for you in ten minutes."

"Oh!" She put one hand to her throat. Her eyes wide. "Don't leave me here alone!"

He glanced at the jockey again.

"Tough stuff isn't going to croak, if that's worrying you."

"Suppose Sam finds me here!"

KEENE went to the living room. "Little late to start worrying about the chances you're taking."

She followed him as far as the bedroom door. "If anyone does come—"

He got the front door open, turned, hand on the knob.

"Gun there in the pocket of your boyfriend's dressing gown." He backed out onto the porch. "Wouldn't advise you to use it, unless you're sure—"

The night exploded, inside his head, into blinding brilliance. Then utter darkness and a sickening sensation of falling—falling helplessly.

The roll saved him.

It was automatic, that protective hunching of one shoulder and the twisting somersault movement. As strictly a reflex as the twitch of the lower leg when a knee is hit just right.

He had learned how to guard himself from nasty falls over a hunter's head when his mount failed to clear a fence or a hedge, back in his old steeplechase days. It had become ingrained habit. Probably it was all that had saved his skull from being battered in like an egg-shell, he realized, when he came to with the taste of blood in his mouth and his face in the dew-moist grass.

The roll had taken him off the porch onto the lawn. It felt as if the sneaking attacker who had clouted him from behind had been able to get in a second blow, after that first terrible smash. Keene's left shoulder ached like a jumping tooth. He couldn't pay much heed to it, though, with the sledge-hammers cracking cobblestones between his ears.

He pulled his knees under him, leaned against the stucco foundation of the porch.

"Sucker," he growled at himself. "Let her talk you dizzy! Let her distract you, there at the door, while the guy crept up behind you and gave you the works! Serves you right!"

He stumbled to his feet. The "No Vacancy" sign was blurry. It took him a second to realize that the night fog was rolling in from the Pacific.

He held his navigator's watch, with its bunged-up dial from that New Guinea nose-over, close to his eyes. 21:10. He couldn't have blacked out more than ten minutes or so.

Before he opened the bungalow door and toed it open, he pulled his shoulder gun out of its holster, thumbled off the safety.

He put on the light.

Nobody . . .

When he went in the bedroom he didn't expect to find anybody there, either. He was wrong about that. Hoo-Hoo was there. Right where Keene had left him. But something new had been added—a disc of sooty black, about the size of a half-dollar, in the hollow of the jockey's right temple. From a yellow-gray lump in the middle of the disc a fat, shiny, red worm crawled down to the angle of the dead man's jaw. From the point of the cleft chin, it wriggled down his throat to the collar of his shirt.

The gun that had been in the pocket of the dressing gown was now in the dead rider's right fist, the fingers clenched tightly around the butt, the thumb loose and relaxed.

It looked like suicide. Everything was the way it should be if Hoo-Hoo had taken the short cut.

"Murder!" Keene said aloud. "Murder by the same cagy lug who framed Johnny's exit so it looked like the result of that car crackup!"

He didn't bother to search for signs of the girl. He knew there wouldn't be any. He wasn't even surprised when he

found only one of the highball glasses left on the mantel in the living room. The one that had been left wouldn't have any lipstick on the rim or any prints on the side. He'd give odds on that.

On his way across the court to Nine, he skirted the deep shadows under the orange trees. The fog felt good on his pounding forehead. As his head cleared, a cold rage built up slowly inside him.

Part of it was a chilling fear. In his work for the Protective Bureau Keene had run into a conglomeration of crooks and con men. "Painters," who dyed stake horses and entered them as ringers in small-time selling races. The benzedrine boys, who hopped up their entries higher than jet planes. "Printers," who ran off their own tote tickets in the back of cars parked in the clubhouse lot.

But this was his first run-in with a fixer whose take was enormous enough to make him willing to risk the gas chamber to protect it. Nothing was more certain than that it wouldn't be Keene's last meeting with the murderer.

THE killer had gone too far to stop, now. He would have to keep on. The police might go for that vengeful husband angle, if and when they learned about it. But to the TRPB man it was grimly clear that both jockeys were dead because of what they had known—or what someone had thought they had known—about the finagler who had been tampering so profitably with the riders at the big track.

Keene didn't try to fool himself about being afraid. He was. But also, he was madder than sin. The killer was making the Bureau's crack representative look like a dummy at his job.

For three weeks now, heavy pressure had been bearing down on him to stamp out the vermin infesting the jockey enclosure. Not merely to find out how the ring operated, how particular riders were approached, or who told them which entry was supposed to come down to the wire in front, but mainly to discover the identity of the mysterious individual behind this wholesale burglary from the betting public.

And now, just when Keene had been on the verge of getting one rider to spill what he knew, two top jockeys had been slaughtered in one night. A couple of miracles would have to be parlayed to get any of the other boys to talk now.

Keene was literally up against a dead end.

The only possibility he saw of getting around it was to gamble on an outside chance.

Not that he was opposed, in principle, to playing long shots. But when the odds were, say, a hundred to one, and the hundred wore uniforms or plainclothes badges while he was the one—that required a certain amount of consideration.

He muttered a phrase from the briefing rooms of his bombing days:

"Times when you have to take a calculated risk, no matter how dangerous it is. Thing is, be sure you calculate it."

He went into Nine.

The light was still on. The corpse was still on the floor by the bed.

Keene used his handkerchief to pick up the phone. He dialed with his under-water pen.

It took a long minute to get any answer.

Then a sleepy voice said:

"Yeah?"

"This, Keene Madden, Al."

"Judas Priest! You schwocked?"

"Sober's a finish judge, Al. I need some help."

"Huh? What time's it?"

"Ten o'clock. I'm at Hoo-Hoo's place. Know where 'tis?"

"Sure. The Sierra Vista. On Foot-hill." The voice on the other end was suddenly wide awake. "Judas! What you doin' with my boy!"

"Not playing parchesi, Al. You better get on out here."

"Priest!" Al roared. "Don't you fiddle around with my boy, night like this! He's got a hundred-thousand-dollar handicap to ride, tomorrow! Don't pull any of that bulldozing stuff on Hoo-Hoo, y'hear me! Or I'll go straight to the stewards! You can't—"

He was still fulminating when Keene hung up, went out and over to Sixteen.

Al Joffer would be along in a hurry, Keene was certain. Anything that might adversely affect his prize client, his late client, Hoo-Hoo Lustani, would bring Al a-running, with blood in his eye. Particularly on the night before the hundred grand Forty-Niner's Handicap.

Keene didn't waste a thought on how the news of the dual deaths would disrupt the big race. He had more immediate worries.

CHAPTER IV

Visiting Night

COUPE rolled swiftly into the court, circling the graveled drive around toward Sixteen.

Keene stood motionless, watching through the wreathing mist until the car parked next the station wagon and a girl in a white slack suit jumped out, followed by a youth who put his arm around her while he locked the car, led her into Bungalow Fifteen.

If that had been a patrol, the fat would really have been in the fire—and sizzling. Keene didn't need any reminder that keeping quiet about homicide was a serious felony, that failure to notify the authorities about a double murder was sheer, stark insanity.

And now he was about to compound a criminal offense by concealing information about a murder suspect. If the police came in on the deal before he had his scheme set up, he would be in over his ears with no way of getting out.

He decided to wait outside Hoo-Hoo's bungalow until Al came. Then at least the blues couldn't catch him with his shorts down.

It was nearly a quarter of an hour. Keene spent it studying the strip of adhesive tape. Then Al's long Caddy purred around the inner circle of the court. The jockey agent was halfway out of the car before he had switched off the lights.

Keene walked in front of the beams.

"Kept you so long?" he asked.

"Judas! I hadda get some clothes on!" Al might have hurried his dressing, but the effect was dapper. Fawn flannels, a crisp shirt, a flaming bow tie. "What goes? Where's th' kid?"

"Inside." Keene led the way.

Al couldn't wait. "What's the matter, Madden! Does th' kid know I'm comin'? Is there anything wrong with him, for Judas—"

"See for yourself." Keene motioned toward the bedroom.

Al took two steps toward the bed before he saw the bullet hole and the gun. He whimpered like a puppy, made vague

pawing motions toward the body on the bed, turned away, stumbled into the bathroom, was sick at his stomach.

When he came out his thin, sharp, birdlike features were greasy gray under the suntan.

"Priest sake," he mumbled. "Did he... Why did he, Madden!"

"Mean suicide? He didn't, Al."

Keene told him everything. From the beginning, with Johnny's phone call. Including the stuff about the girl.

The stuff about the girl stopped Al, cold.

"Wait—wait! She says she's what?"

"Claimed she used to be Mrs. Cady."

"Oh, no-o-o!" Al collapsed on the other bed, rolled over, face down, moaning. "This I can't take! I can't believe that! I wo-o-n't!"

"Know her?"

Al levered himself up with his forearms, looking as if he'd been kicked in the teeth:

"Do I know her! Judas Priest, Madden, Enid's my daughter!" The agent closed his eyes, swayed his head from side to side in misery.

"Grip on y'self, fella. Have to face it. Figure out what to do."

"I can't think," Al said thickly. "I can't figure a single thing in the world, except I know she'd never do a thing like—" He waved shudderingly at the bed beside him—"like this! Never!"

"Be tough to keep her name from getting mixed up in the mess." Keene thought he heard the crunch of tires on gravel. "But we could try. Might be better all around, way I had in mind. Not that it's going to smell like roses no matter what we do."

Al's face puckered like that of a man with cramps.

"You make the decisions, Madden. I'm going crazy!"

"Need your wits about you, if we're going to keep her in the clear—" Keene began, and stopped.

Footsteps on the porch! Pounding on the door!

He held his gun against his left hip. When he swung the door open, he stood well behind it.

The plump man outside cocked one surprised eyebrow up beneath the brim of his hundred-dollar panama.

"You here, too? Is everybody trying to get in on the act?"

"Room for one more." Keene beckoned

him in. "You have a special invitation, Mr. Hoadley?"

AUSTIN HOADLEY teetered back and forth on his patent leathers, running the thumb and forefinger of his right hand up and down the satin lapel of his white dinner jacket. His bland, china-blue eyes, his red-apple cheeks and his small, pouty lips made Keene think of a pink bisque doll—middle-aged and nattily attired—but with a cherubic expression so permanently molded on his chubby features that they gave no hint of what might be going on behind that mild, slightly mocking gaze.

"Hoo-Hoo's done me the honor of giving me a standing invitation to drop in any time I'm in the neighborhood, Madden. But this doesn't happen to be a social call. I have a matter of business to discuss with him." The owner of the renowned Shadowlawn Stables sauntered in. "Where is he? Are you keeping him under wraps?"

"Not me. No." Keene closed the door. "In the bedroom."

Hoadley blinked his eyes with the slow, mechanical movement of a doll. "You Protective Bureau people! Always trying to make everything appear so mysterious! What's it all about?" He went to the bedroom door, halted abruptly, swearing beneath his breath.

Al lifted his head from his hands long enough to exclaim, "Judas!" then re-slapsed into silence.

"Blew his top, did he?" Hoadley erupted.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" Keene said. "His own gun."

"But—" the horse owner blurted, "but why? Why?"

"Didn't leave any good-bye note."

Keene reshuffled his plans hastily.

This unexpected advent of Hoo-Hoo's contract employer really balled things up in good shape. Setting up a scheme to hoodwink the police, in cahoots with Al Joffer, that was one thing. Particularly when Al, himself, seemed to be too stunned to formulate any plans for keeping his daughter out of a bad jam.

But to put over anything like that with one of turfdom's top owners, that was another color of horse. When you were clocking racing people for class you had to rate Austin Hoadley right up there in front. To hope the breeder of Merrison and Blue Lady and the great Briskova would connive at the concealment of a double assassination, that was expecting a little too much.

Still, Keene had to shoot at the moon. "Only half the picture here, Mr. Hoadley. Other half's over in Bungalow Nine."

Hoadley's face was a puzzled blank. "Other half?"

"Johnny Cady. He's over there in his bungalow, ready for the embalmer, too. Head bashed in."

The owner's mouth opened but he didn't say anything.

Al started pitching. "Johnny an' Hoo-Hoo been battling for weeks. Johnny took a sock at my boy in the jockey house last week. Hoo-Hoo gave Johnny a rough ride in the seventh, this afternoon. Stewards hadda warn 'em both."

Hoadley took off his panama, ran manicured fingers through his wavy white hair, thick and glossy as goose feathers.

"You're not suggesting murder and suicide came out of a jockey feud! I've seen too many of those things. Half of them are phony, anyhow, put on to stir up excitement for the two-buck tims!"

"Was a girl in it, too," Keene said.

[Turn page]

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"Hoo-Hoo's mouse, playing around with Johnny, or maybe the other way 'round."

"That's right," Al backed him up. "She was here tonight. Then she went over to Johnny's, near's we can make out. Hoo-Hoo was hitting the cork some. He musta chased her over to Johnny's, beat him to a pulp an' come back here to take the self exit."

The owner put his hat on again. "You know better than that, Al! What *do* you know?"

"That's the way it was meant to look, Mr. Hoadley," Keene cut in fast, before the agent could answer. "Maybe, all things considered, it'd be better to leave it at that."

Hoadley gave him the sleepy-doll blink: "Why?"

"Because what the cops might uncover, if we tell the whole story, won't smell very good," Keene held up his index finger. "First place, a fixer's been gumming up the pools for three weeks now. One race on every card's been rigged. Plenty of proof that one of these boys—possibly both—were in on the rigging."

"Johnny, maybe," Al muttered. "Johnny was a no-good, from 'way back. But this I couldn't believe about Hoo-Hoo. I couldn't."

"What else?" asked Hoadley.

"Second place"—Keene stuck up his middle finger—"Johnny phoned me tonight. Somebody'd monkeyed with his car so a front wheel came off while he was driving home here, nearly killed him. He was so scared he was ready to do a bunk. An' ready to spill what he knew about the fix-ring. If it wasn't Hoo-Hoo who killed Johnny, then it was Mr. Fix."

THE agent nodded agreement.

"Y'see what it means, Mr. Hoadley. If we put it up to the cops that way, then we got to admit this Mr. Fix snapped the switch on Hoo-Hoo, too. Which only goes to say your top rider was one of the jocks who were pulling mounts or runnin' wide at the turns, in order to earn a dirty buck. I'd hate to have people say that about him, now he's dead."

"Still," Hoadley objected, "murder!"

"Third place," Keene went on, "if we tell the blues about this race-fixing, the killer will figure the risk is too great for him to keep on with his daily frame-ups. He'll crawl back under his wet rock.

We'll lose our best chance to nail him by finding out how he tampers with the boys. Maybe he keeps under cover long enough so we never do get him for the murders. Or maybe he'll crawl out later on to corrupt other riders and hook onto a few hundred thousand more of the public's dough."

Hoadley caressed the lapel of his dinner jacket lovingly. "If I understand you, it's your idea we should attempt to convince the authorities this was simply murder for jealousy and suicide for remorse?"

"Not 'we.'" Keene shook his head. "Not me. If the blues find me here, if they knew about my having been here, they'll put this and that together and come up with the answer we don't want them to. No Protective Bureau man would be in on a thing like this, unless there was a crooked race angle. If we're going to put it up to them the other way, it'll have to be your dish of berries. I'll scramoose and let you two handle it."

Hoadley frowned delicately. "We'd be paddling around in a pool of nitroglycerin, to keep information from the police in a murder case."

"Not kidding," Keene shrugged. "Other hand, if you don't stick to the girl-quarrel angle, by tomorrow a few more jockeys may be getting measured for coffins to keep *them* from talking."

Hoadley eyed Keene thoughtfully. "You wouldn't be getting out of this because you don't want the police to know you were the last person to see these two boys alive, would you?"

"Not the last," Keene answered brusquely. "If you're going to start that stuff—"

"Oh! Judas!" Al flapped his hands unhappily. "That don't make sense, pointin' th' finger at Madden. Just as well say it was me, because I come here tonight. Or you." The agent froze, his eyes bulging at the owner. "Say, Mr. Hoadley, why *did* you happen to come around tonight?"

The owner of Shadowlawn was smooth as butter. "Hoo-Hoo said he wanted to see me. Said he had a matter of the utmost urgency to discuss with me. I haven't an idea what it was about. Maybe the big handicap tomorrow. Maybe something quite different."

Keene had an idea what it might have been about. But he didn't say it out loud.

Sirens were wailing in the distance. That Foothill operator must have succeeded in tracing Hoo-Hoo's number, finally.

Keene had no wish to be among those present when the blues arrived. So all he said was:

"Seeing you. Watch your footwork with those cops. . ."

In his car, his headlights bored through the mist. Even the metronomic rhythm of the windshield wiper hurt his head. There was a taste in his mouth as if he had been licking rusty tin cans.

But at that, he was feeling better than Al Joffer and Austin Hoadley would be, right about now.

For there were several points which they might find it difficult to explain to skeptical officers. There was that smashed whisky bottle beside Lustani's bed, the busted telephone, Hoo-Hoo's broken wrist. That was a little item the murderer had overlooked when setting up the tableau in the bungalow.

CHAPTER V

A Session with Enid



WHEN the police tried to piece together the sequence of the murder and subsequent suicide, Keene thought, their main trouble would come. Why would Hoo-Hoo have gone over to Johnny's in pajamas? Or if he hadn't, why would he have changed into pajamas before doing the Dutch? "How you going to figure that one out, boys?"

Then there was the girl. The cops would start to probe around. It wouldn't take them long to find out that Johnny had once been married to the present Mrs. Sam Kurtch. They would be sure to put her on the grill, to find out what she knew about Johnny.

Maybe she really did know the answer. Could be she had clouted her ex-spouse over the head for reasons of her own. But Keene doubted it. Still, Enid might spill the whole bag of nails. If so, the blues would come a-hunting for Keene. They would want to have a good, sound explanation for his beating it, like this. They would wonder why he hadn't

stayed there and told them about the girl.

For a moment he wondered about that himself. Back there at Murder Court, it had seemed like a low trick to turn in a dame who had saved his life at least once tonight—probably twice. There, near her, he hadn't been able to bring himself to believe she'd have warned him of Hoo-Hoo's attack, if she had killed Johnny. She would have let Lustani crown him, wouldn't she?

But now, away from her, with the damp chill of the fog cooling his blood, Keene wasn't so sure. Her suggestion that Sam Kurtch was the murderer seemed a trifle too pat, now.

The monster structure of the grandstand showed up ahead, faintly luminous in the mist. Keene drove to the barn entrance, stopped for the Pinkerton at the guard-booth to recognize him.

The Pink came over. "Murder, ain't it?"

Keene stared. "'s that?"

"This fog. When you got a spot of asthma, like I have, these night fogs are plain murder, Mr. Madden."

"Oh! Yair." Keene put on a prop smile, drove in.

He left his car in front of the clubhouse, used a key on a door marked "Strictly No Admittance," went through the restaurant, back of the mutual windows, up a short flight to his office.

He mixed himself a benzedrine highball, with a couple of tablets and a glass of faucet water, washed his face, sagged into the swivel chair and began to work the phone.

When the operator woke him, on the last call-back, the east window was glowing with pink and salmon. It was still dark outside. By the time he'd had three cups of Old Black Joe at the stablehand's lunchstand, it was light.

Horses were being walked out to the track. A scattering of clockers drifted into the grandstand—middle-aged, weatherbitten men in topcoats smelling of the stables. They gathered in knots of three or four. Keene heard the names of Cady and Lustani from every group as he searched the cluster of trainers at the rail for the man he wanted.

A chestnut colt breezed down the stretch, his Negro exercise boy low over the animal's neck. A big, powerfully-built man in a rumpled seersucker suit, a soiled trenchcoat and a yellowed straw

skimmer glanced at his stop-watch and grunted disdainfully.

Keene came up beside him, leaned on the top rail. "Morning, Sam."

The trainer turned. His wide gash of mouth turned down at the corners, his meaty face went deeper red.

"I must get me one of those hearing aids," he remarked. "I heard the Protective Bureau only hired smart cookies, but I certainly heard wrong. I must correct that."

"'s on your mind, Sam?"

"Strange as it might seem to a dumb gumshoe, I have a race on my mind. A big handicap with a hundred-thousand-dollar purse. In this race today I enter a horse which has a good chance to wind up fourth or fifth biggest money winner of all time, if it can get down in front this once. But his chances are nokay now, because I have no top rider. And that, you bird-brain, is your doing!"

"Told you that? Hoadley?"

"Who else? If you hadn't stuck your stumblebum paws into this, Hoo-Hoo'd be out there on Briskova right now, instead of on a slab at the morgue!" Kurtch scowled, shaking a clenched fist at the chestnut colt, streaking along the back stretch.

"What you so sore about, Sam? You may lose a purse. Those two boys lost their lives."

KEENE studied the meaty countenance of the Kentucky hard-boots.

"About you!" Kurtch said. "Boyscout-in' around, tryin' to 'clean up racing,' and only giving it a black eye and a bloody nose. I been in this business since we used sundials to time the morning works, and I've never seen as much fidoodling at the tracks as in the last couple years, since you Protective busters took over."

"Never seen as much money going through the mutuel wickets as in the last two years either, Sam. The crooks have a bigger score to shoot at—bound to be more of 'em trying to hit." Keene followed as the trainer swung away from the rail toward the barns. "Hoadley tell you anything else about last night?"

Kurtch stalked angrily ahead. "That mahaha about a quarrel over some girl. Not even those yawp cops would swallow a goof-ball like that!"

Horses jogged past, on their way to the oval. Grooms walked colts in slow

circles around the barn paddocks, cooling out. Kurtch stopped beside the rangy chestnut colt, spoke briefly to the exercise boy.

The trainer stooped, ran his hand expertly along the back of the colt's legs, feeling the tendons, handling the knee and ankle to see if there was any heat indicating trouble.

"This one is ready to go, Madden. We ought to win with Briskova. If we don't, and if anyone asks me why we don't, I'm going to tell 'em straight it's because a Protective Bureau nosy joe was responsible for our not having our regular contract rider, the one who could get the run out of this colt."

"Wouldn't say that, if I were you."

In his heart Keene sympathized with the man. He, too, had been brought up to respect and admire the thoroughbred, and this high-strung animal, with its coat glowing coppery red in the morning sun, was assuredly one of the greatest the Bluegrass had ever produced.

It was easy to understand how the man who had been pointing Briskova for this one race for weeks, the climax of a racing career, would feel about anything which lessened the colt's chances. Yet they were beginning to attract attention from some of the stable-hands. It would muck up the whole deal if Kurtch should keep on shooting off his mouth this way. Keene had to shut him up, quickly and quietly.

"Might get your wife in wrong," he said softly.

The trainer was squatting, examining a hoof. He glared up fiercely.

"Was that a crack, Madden?"

"Call it that."

Kurtch stood up. His mouth was a thin slash across an enraged face. "I'll shove it right down your throat."

"Next time you see her, ask her where she was last night about nine-thirty."

The trainer grabbed Keene's shirt-front in knotty fingers.

"She was with me. That's where she was."

"She was at Hoo-Hoo's. And if you were with her, pretty quick you'll be over at the station house seeing what the boys in the back room will have."

Kurtch drew back, his eyes smoldering. "She wasn't near that auto court." His neck swelled, his jaw muscles knotted. "She wouldn't have dared! She knows I'd cut the heart out of any man I

found her with!" He stopped short.

"See?" Keene tapped him lightly on the chest. "Told you, y' didn't want to talk about a thing like that."

The trainer's nostrils distended like those of a frightened horse. "You leave Enid out of it, understand?"

"I don't need any hearing aid, Sam. If you were to tell me, right now, where you were, last night from say, eighty-three to ten, I could hear every single syllable."

Sam Kurtch beckoned to the exercise boy, strode into the barn without opening his mouth. . . .

THE house was Moorish, set on a hillside, behind a row of scraggly Eucalyptus trees. Red rambler roses climbed all over the porch. Pink lingerie decorated a clothesline in the side yard.

Enid must have seen him coming up the walk, for she answered the doorbell almost before he rang it.

"Wowie!" she cried. "Am I glad to see you!"

"Nice, homey touch." He let her see he admired the white playsuit with its halter top, bare midriff and flaring shorts, an agreeable contrast to her bronze tan. "But you don't have to put on an act."

"I am glad to see you," she insisted. "I was so horribly afraid you were—you know."

"Corpsified?" He felt that same impact of closeness to her, as if he'd stepped into the field of some magnet that tingled his nerves and made him want to breathe deeply. "You ran away without stopping to find out."

"I did not." She was indignant. "I made sure you were breathing, before I left. But I couldn't tell whether that—that man had fractured your skull or something."

"Didn't call a doctor for me, though."

"I'm what my father calls a no-good, I know." She led him into a living room with framed oils of horses, charcoal sketches of horses, red and black prints of trotters, a row of silver-plated racing shoes on the mantel. "But I was so wretchedly afraid to stay there."

"Should have thought you'd be afraid to go out, with that guy skulking around."

"I was." She bit her lips. He thought her contriteness was phony. "But it was better to make a run for it than wait for

him to come in after me."

"All right, all right." He made an effort to take his eyes off her. He felt as if she could make him believe anything, as long as he was looking at her. "Get to it. Who was he?"

"How on earth could I tell!" She wrinkled her forehead in astonishment. "All I saw was a silhouette against the light. A big man, as near as I could tell."

"Big as Sammy?"

"It's so hard to say. Honestly I can't be sure. When I heard him hit you, I rushed back to the bedroom to grab Hoo-Hoo's pistol. By the time I got it out of his dressing gown and ran out on the porch to help you, he had disappeared."

Keene dropped into a wingback. Sammy was evidently a man who liked his comfort, for a worn footstool stood in front of the chair.

"Had the gun then," he said. "But you didn't shoot it, to rouse the people in the next bungalow?"

She sat on the footstool, her knees almost touching his.

"How could I do that? With Johnny dead in Number Nine and Hoo-Hoo still unconscious! I simply couldn't have done it, unless I had to—to save your life."

"But you made sure I was still breathing, so you didn't worry about me."

"Go on. Be nasty. I deserve it." She crinkled her nose at him. "I did so worry about you. But I was so rattled I couldn't think straight. First I scuttled back inside and locked the door. Then I realized how utterly dumb it was to shut myself in with Hoo-Hoo, if it really was Sam prowling around outside in the fog."

"What'd you do with the gun?"

"Left it on the bed beside Hoo-Hoo. I thought he might need it to protect himself."

"Needed it, all right. Whether he used it—that's a matter of opinion." He took a folded *News* out of his pocket, spread it so she could see the headlines:

**FAMOUS JOCKEYS MEET DEATH
IN DOUBLE TRAGEDY**
Bodies of Cady, Lustani Found In Foothill
Auto Court—Quarrel Over Girl Believed
Cause of Murder and Suicide—
Police Seeking Her

She toppled sideward off the stool before he could grab her.

He picked her up, put her on the divan

beneath the painting of Seabiscuit. She was as limp as a rag doll.

In the bookcase was a decanter of cognac. He got it, held her head on his arm, dribbled brandy into her mouth. Enid gagged, coughed, opened her eyes, pushed the decanter away.

"You think I did that?" She had trouble speaking. "Shot Hoo-Hoo?"

"What you expect me to think?" He helped her sit up. She leaned against his arm for support. "You were in Johnny's bedroom. I go in and find Johnny demised. Last I knew, you were in Hoo-Hoo's bedroom, and when I go back there, he's croaked. Maybe you're just unfortunate. Maybe murder just happens to follow you around. On the other hand—"

She sat up stiffly, away from his arm. "Why don't you call the cops? Tell them to come pick me up?"

"Because I'm sap enough to give you the benefit of the doubt—providing . . ."

CHAPTER VI

A Warning



ENID looked at Keene out of the corners of her eyes. One of her hands went to her throat, slid down from her neck to the smooth plumpness of the halter bra.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Get some clothes on. Come to the track

with me."

"No!" She sprang to her feet. "Go there and hear everyone talking about Hoo-Hoo? Have people tell me how sorry they are about Johnny? Go to the paddock with Sam, to give Briskova the good-luck pat? Watch the handicap, with this cold lump in my heart? What do you think I'm made of?"

"Be more to it'n that," he told her quietly. "Be some danger. You'll be live bait in a trap to catch a killer. That's the way it has to be. You're the only lure I can be sure will work. Go climb into some pretties."

Her lips quivered; her eyes filled with tears. "I was kind of getting to like you. I thought maybe I'd like you a lot. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to

hate your insides."

She marched across the room, down the hall. There was an angry slam. It didn't sound like a bedroom door, somehow.

He moved fast. In the hall there were two doors, one shut.

Maybe the polite thing would be to call out, wait for her to open the door. Keene wasn't in any mood for Emily-posting. He banged the door open.

He had a glimpse of gauzy curtains blowing in the breeze from the open window, a canopied four-poster with ruffled bedclothing, a bureau with gilt bottles and crystal boxes, a vanity with angled mirrors, a half-open closet full of dresses on hangers. Then orange tongues spat at him venomously, seeming to come from every direction at once. The bedroom thundered and reverberated with the echoes of gunfire.

Something punched at his right shoulder, spun him around. He let his knees buckle, lurching sideward as the spitting flame came at him again from the three angles of the dressing-table mirrors.

He crawled back to the protection of the hall. Not until he struggled to get his gun out of its armpit holster did he realize that the first slug actually had caught him in the shoulder. He couldn't manage his right hand too well.

He gripped the automatic with both hands, blasted through the bedroom door at that closet.

He used up a clip without drawing any return fire. When he finally crawled into the bedroom, there wasn't anyone in the closet, dead or alive. . . .

The jockeys were making their one o'clock weights with the clerk of scales, standing around with their three-pound saddles, pads and crash helmets, waiting their turns to be checked off the Fairbanks when the Pink on guard at the enclosure straightened up and saluted.

"Nice afternoon for the handicap, Mist' Madden."

"Sokay, Bill."

Keene sauntered through the gate into the jockey yard. It would have taken sharp eyes to notice that the right shoulder of his sports jacket was a little lumpier than the other.

At the track infirmary, after they had X-rayed and probed and sterilized and bandaged, they had insisted he stay flat on his back. He had got up with no

delay. They had warned him he mustn't move around or he would risk infection. He told them that was the least of his troubles.

The bullet hadn't smashed any bones or severed any arteries. But the wound hurt like a red-hot corkscrew being twisted around in that shoulder.

The pain was secondary to the strain of wondering when the killer would make the third try at crossing Keene off the list. But what bothered him most was the certainty that he was putting others in peril.

Sam Kurtch had called the turn. If Keene hadn't put the pressure on Johnny Cady yesterday, Johnny would be here getting into his white breeches now. Same for Hoo-Hoo. Both had been put out with an assist, however unintentional, from the man who was supposed to protect racing from the larcenous.

NOW Keene was about to put others in jeopardy. He wouldn't have minded putting Enid on the spot, to bring Mr. Fix out in the open. It seemed reasonably plain she wasn't in much danger from the murderer. She had escaped harm after being close to him at least twice in the last twelve hours.

"You're eliminating the possibility she's the killer, aren't you, sucker?" Keene asked himself. "You can't bring yourself to believe she'd have tried to gun you into eternity, back there at Sammy's cottage, can you? You know she was in that bedroom. You haven't a particle of proof there was anyone else hiding in that closet. But you're going to keep right on believing she's innocent until you get yourself permanently convinced the hard way!"

He strolled across to the jockey house. A few of the riders spoke to him, but their greetings were curt and cool.

Of course none of the boys were ever loosened up much, after putting in a couple of hours in the steam room to get down to impost. Going without water on a hot day, to keep from adding weight, didn't improve their dispositions, either.

But there was an unaccustomed tension in the air today. They avoided him. Their conversation ceased when he came within earshot. They had the wind up about Johnny and Hoo-Hoo, all right.

Still, that was to be expected. Nobody

at the track was discussing anything else but the twin tragedies.

At the end of a lane of green steel lockers, beneath hanging racks with a rainbow of racing silks, Keene found a tubby, baldish man stitching on a vermillion satin sleeve.

"Tricks, Lou."

"Rotten, Mr. Madden." Lou Blossom looked up glumly. "I lost the best friend I had in the world. I been with Hoo-Hoo six years. I liked that little guy better'n I did my own brother." The valet laid down his sewing. "I know they was a lot of people didn't go for him. But to me he was tops. He gimme the breaks when I was broke. He never done me dirty." He drew a long breath. "I don't care what they say about him. If he cracked Johnny Cady's skull, then Johnny had it comin'. But me, I don't believe that's the way it happened!"

Keene sat down on the locker bench. "How you dope it, Lou?"

The valet lowered his eyes, sullenly. "I got nothin' to go on."

"Go on that, then."

"Well, I figure the fink who's been passing out them hunks of lettuce to the other boys makes a bid to Hoo-Hoo." He raised his head, stared defiantly in Keene's eyes. "Fact, I know he made th' kid an offer. Yesterday."

"How?"

Lou shrugged, looked down at the torn sleeve of the jacket.

"Hoo-Hoo don't go into no details with me. Just says he'll see the bum in the hot place before he pulls a mount."

"He know the fella pulling the strings?"

"I don't think so. Far's I can find out, none of th' riders know who it is, payin' off. I got no way of telling whether it's on the level or not, because it's just tack-room git-gat-giddle mostly, but the word is that some boy gets told which entry is to win, an' how much he'll collect, if that other horse does come in. It don't matter how he loses, th' way I hear it, long's he does lose. An' th' payoff gent never welshes, 'cording to the grapevine. They get their dough, by mail maybe, but still nobody knows who sends it."

"Must be a lot of ginzos who suspect."

Keene looked up at the rack of freshly dry-cleaned silks, waiting. But if the valet had any ideas, he kept them to himself.

"Hoo-Hoo might've," he said. "But he didn't tell me."

"Who's putting a leg up on Briskova, in the big go, Lou?"

"Mr. Joffer was tryin' to get Stretch Wazey. I don't know if he sets it up. He's in the hot box now, talkin' to Stretch."

"Ask Al to step in here a sec, will you?"

When Al came in from the steam room, Keene was going through the stuff in Hoo-Hoo's locker—boots, spare saddles, bats, plastic helmet liners.

"Where's your daughter, Al?"

THE jockey agent looked gray and tired.

"She was home with Sam, when I called last night," he said. "I told her I had to see her right away. She said she'd come over to my hotel first thing this morning, but she didn't show. I been calling her ever since ten o'clock but there's no answer. I just don't know what to think, what to do."

"Speak to Sam about it?"

"About Enid's being at Hoo-Hoo's? Judas, no! I been talking to him about gettin' Wazey up on Briskova. An' about Hoo-Hoo, of course. But I wouldn't want to get her in any worse jam than she's in already. Judas!"

"Be hard to do that, Al. She's in up to there, now." Keene winced at a lancing stab in his shoulder. "Is Stretch Wazey one of your boys?"

"No. I only got a couple, good enough to handle a colt like Briskova. They both got contract commitments for the handicap. Wazey's a smart finisher, though he ain't in Hoo-Hoo's class at judgin' pace. But he's the best we can get. So Sam says, take him."

"Wazey still boiling out?"

"He's about thorough."

"Get him out here."

"Stretch" Wazey came out of the steam room wearing a Turkish towel and a sneering scowl.

"Now look, Mr. Madden. You don't need to come up with any of that hooley about giving Briskova a clean ride."

"Maybe not, Stretch." Keene studied the jockey's round, button-nosed face. "But there'll be a pile of jack on the Shadowlawn entry. The colt will probably go to post an odds-on favorite. Somebody could make a big killing if one of the outsiders hit that finish first."

"You don't have to fret about Stretch doin' his best," Al said. "He's been up on sixty-four mounts, this meeting, an' he's brought twelve of 'em in first, nine in second, an' seven in for third money. That's—"

"—Not the whole picture," Keene cut in, mildly. "You've been disqualified twice, charged with interference half a dozen times. The performance observers have marked you low in their books on at least a couple other occasions, Stretch. Just lettin' you know we're keeping those things in mind—in case Briskova doesn't do as well as expected."

"Funny thing about horses," the jockey snarled. "I've never been able to get 'em to tell me in advance whether they feel like giving out or not. If Mr. Hoadley's entry doesn't pick up the winner's purse, it won't be my fault. I'm only the rider. Not th' trainer. Maybe th' colt was out with his girl friend last night an' don't feel like running today!"

Keene flicked the jockey's hairy chest with the back of his left hand.

"I'll lay it on the line, Stretch. Somebody might offer you a large slice of stuff to bring Briskova in second, or third."

"Ah-h-h!" Stretch made a pushing-away motion with both hands. "I've kept my nose clean an' my record clear of suspensions for nine years, ever since I started in as an apprentice. I'll have you know I resent th' way you're talkin'. I'll take it up with th' jockey association, too!"

"Don't blow a fuse. Babies who've been manipulating these things might not even try to frame up the handicap. Or they might decide to bet their pile on Briskova anyway. But if they do put the pressure on you, it could be with more than money."

"Judas Priest, Keene!" Al exclaimed. "You're not going to—"

Keene held up a traffic cop palm. "Johnny Cady was told to lose the seventh, yesterday. He won it. Few hours later, somebody bangs his brains out."

Wazey puckered his eyes in a squint. "I thought th' papers said—"

"Hoo-Hoo was probably given his orders last night, about what to do today." Keene went on. "Chances are he bucked. An' he's dead. So it wouldn't be too surprising if other riders who might be approached got cold feet or something. See what I mean, Stretch?"

"Nobody puts the scare on me!" Stretch blustered. "I ride my race the way my owner tells me to, an' th' devil with what anybody else wants me to do!"

"S th' way," Keene agreed solemnly. "Just wanted to make sure we understand each other."

The clerk of scales put his head in the door.

"All riders for the first race, to paddock!"

CHAPTER VII

Long Shot Bet



NUMERALS on the odds-board changed as the lighted "Time-is-now" figures flicked from 3:16 to 3:17.

A zombie croak from the speaker system announced:

"Five minutes until the mutuel windows close for the fifth race, the special Forty-Nin-

er's Handicap, with a purse of one hundred thousand dollars added."

From his place of concealment inside the binocular-renting concession booth, Keene sized up the odds and informed himself, sourly, that he must have been wrong about the fix being in on the big race.

None of the things he'd figured on had happened, so far.

No word had come from Al, who had promised to keep a hawk's eye on Stretch Wazey, to report any approach made to the rider. No notification from the Pinks that Austin Hoadley had come into the track. Enid hadn't showed, though Sam had informed him with violent profanity she would be here, she'd better be here, or there would be consequences.

The supervisor at the sellers' windows, across there on the other side of the clubhouse betting floor, had failed to make the signal agreed on. *No!* There it was! The "Temporarily Closed" card, stuck out in front of Wicket Eight!

Somebody had come up with a fat, last minute bet on one of the outsiders. The same thing that had happened once every previous day, when a long shot had come down in front under suspicious circumstances!

He lifted the hinged shelf of the binocular booth, ducked out quickly.

Behind Wicket Eight, the supervisor was holding up one hand with the thumb closed. Keene headed for Four, a \$50 WIN window. There were a dozen people in the queue. At the head of it was a woman in a preposterous flowered print and a floppy, wide-brimmed hat.

He came up behind her as the teller finished punching the lever and stacking the tickets.

"Two thousand on Number Six."

Under the wide brim, behind the dark glasses—Enid. Keene caught her arm as she swung away from the window, stuffing the tickets into a huge straw handbag.

She drew back, startled, but made no attempt to shake off his hand.

"Must break your heart," he observed, "listening to all these people talking about Johnny, getting ready to watch the race Hoo-Hoo was slated to win, betting your wad on . . . What is Number Six, anyway? Hemet Boy?"

He glanced up at the odds board. Number Six was dropping from 30-1 to 20-1.

She brazened it out. "It's my money. I can bet it any way I want."

"No law against it," he admitted. "But the stewards will be interested in why a trainer's wife puts down a big chunk on a horse that's running against his entry."

"I don't have to explain. I liked the price on Hemet Boy and he's got four legs just like all the others!"

"Mmm." Keene steered her toward the paddock. "On form, your hubby's horse figures to finish before Hemet Boy gets up to the head of the stretch. You know something?"

"No," she snapped. "I don't know anything. I pick 'em by poking a hatpin at the program. I feel like doing the same thing to you."

"Thanks. Had all I want of people poking things through me. Know what I mean?"

She didn't answer.

"Poison," he said tightly. "I've been trying to think of the word for you and that's what it is—you're poison to everyone who comes near you."

They moved together toward the crowd surging in from the paddock toward the grandstand. Sport flannels and slack suits; binoculars hanging over their shoulders; tags dangling from

lapels. Old, young, fat, thin, red-faced, beach-tanned, milling in and out of the hot brilliance and the hard, black shadows.

"Johnny tried to cover up for you, and he got the full treatment," Keene said, and felt Enid's muscles tense under his fingers. "Hoo-Hoo fell for you—and what happened to him?"

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Sam's tried to keep you out of trouble, so now he's sweating blood behind an eight ball bigger'n Mount Baldy. I didn't get as close to you as any of them, but I've been on the floor twice, long enough for the old guy with the scythe to start counting over me."

ENID seemed preoccupied. She let him pilot her toward the horses circling in the paddock with the sun dappling them into bright, metallic copper, or shining black glass.

"Are you going to turn me over to the police?"

"You've heard the oldie about there being no arrest for the wicked? No. This isn't a pinch. This's only a slight squeeze. But don't get any wrong ideas—the pressure'll build up right along, until you put the finger on Brother Fix!"

From across the paddock Austin Hoadley waved jauntily and sauntered over.

The high-strung three-year-old danced nervously away from the groom with the girth.

"I wish Sammy'd get here," Shadowlawn's owner murmured. "I don't like the way Briskova's acting up."

Enid pointed. "Here comes Sam. With my father—and Stretch."

The jockey strode between the two older men, flicking his whip against his glistening boots, swinging his arms so the scarlet sleeves and grass-green blouse of the Shadowlawn Stables shone like burnished metal in the sun. He glared with open hostility at Keene.

Al looked older and sicker than he had two hours before. Something close to a grimace of pain passed over his face as he caught sight of Enid. Only Sam Kurtch appeared oblivious of the man from the Protective Bureau. He whipped off the beat-up straw hat when Hoadley said the colt was too fidgety to suit him.

"He's all right, Mr. Hoadley. I don't like him to be too quiet on the grass.

He'll steady when he's had his trial."

Hoadley's eyes swept the growing circle of fans that pressed closer to the colt.

"All these people—they excite him too much."

Al pinched the skin of his cheek between thumb and forefinger. "They been reading the papers, Mr. Hoadley. You can't blame them."

The bugle sounded Boots and Saddles. The lead pony walked with dignity to the track gate. Sam helped Stretch to mount.

"Don't forget what I told you," he admonished.

The jockey touched his whip to the visor of his cap.

Hoadley stood close to the high stirrup. "I'm counting on you, boy."

Stretch nodded. "I want this one as much as you do, sir."

Al cleared his throat. "Enid—"

She stepped to Briskova, ran a hand along his neck, patted his withers. The colt twisted his head around, nickering.

"Luck, Stretch," she said listlessly, and turned away quickly.

For a second the jockey sat stiffly, watching her. Then he tightened his knees and moved the colt away. The leg wrinkles which showed Briskova's superior breeding rippled smoothly in the sunlight.

The five who were left behind followed the white "2" with their eyes until Stretch walked the colt right out of sight beyond the wall. Keene wondered if the curious crowd noticed how carefully owner, trainer, daughter and agent avoided looking at each other.

Hoadley relieved the tension a little. "Like to have you all watch this from my box." He included Keene and Enid in his vague gesture.

"The horses are now on the track," stated the sepulchral loud-speaker.

They were swallowed up by the dense throng surging toward the grandstand, into the clubhouse, against the rail. Snatches of comment peppered them like stinging buckshot.

"—used to be Johnny Cady's wife."
"—would have ridden Briskova today."
"—think she'd at least have the decency to—"

"—married that trainer, afterward."
Enid shivered, kept her eyes straight ahead, stonily.

The oppressive feeling of a thunder-

storm about to break returned to the group as soon as the gray-uniformed usher closed the door of the owner's box behind them.

Keene had experienced the same sensation waiting for the first crack of lightning to split the skies.

He knew it wasn't reasonable to suppose the killer would be stupid enough to give himself away by committing another homicide right there, in plain sight of thousands. But the crawly sensation at the back of his neck reminded him that murderers notoriously were addicted to unreasonable acts.

HOADLEY flicked a platinum lighter at the tip of a long Havana.

"What are our chances, Sammy?" he asked.

The trainer stared at the lighted figures on the infield tote board. They blinked out and came on again as he watched.

"The favorite players think they're pretty good, boss. They've got us down to three to five now."

"Those odds aren't smart," Al muttered. "Not with a new boy up. We shouldn't be shorter'n even money. If we only had Hoo-Hoo—" His voice trailed off, wearily.

Keene watched the file of dainty thoroughbreds canter easily back toward the starting gate, after their trial gallops. The racing silks—orange blouse, blue and white lozenge blouse, watermelon pink with emerald hoops, yellow with purple spots, gray and garnet checkered, Shadowlawn's green with scarlet sleeves—made a vivid flash against the pale dun of the foothills and the deep lavender of the distant Sierra Madres.

"Rider may not make so much difference," he observed, "if the fix is in."

They turned toward him, hostility in every face.

"Think it is in," he added coolly. "On Number Six. Hemet Boy."

"The horses," croaked the track announcer, "are at the post!"

Sam Kurtch pushed the yellowed straw back off his forehead.

"If you're not just running off at the mouth, Buster, why don't you do something about it?"

"I will," Keene promised.

Hoadley gripped Keene's shoulder in agitation. "You have no right to let those horses get out of that gate if you

have any knowledge this race is framed, Madden!"

Keene moved the owner's hand off the throbbing shoulder. "Didn't say I know. Said I think, Mr. Hoadley."

"Judas Priest!" Al muttered indignantly. "This's the devil of a time to bring it up! What makes you think so?"

"Bets," Keene was short. "Odds on the other entries are still pretty close to the morning line. Price on Hemet Boy started at forty to one. Look at it now."

The winking figures on the infield board said Number Six was now 14 to 1.

"If you Protective Bureau wiseys suspect there's dirty work going on," Enid said frostily, "why don't you keep the gamblers away from the track?"

"Isn't gamblers," he interrupted. "I'm strong for gamblers, myself. That's what this business depends on. Fixer's a person who hasn't the nerve to gamble. Wants to make it a sure thing."

He looked out over the crowd, climbing on chairs on the clubhouse lawn, aiming their field-glasses at the starting gate, hanging over the rail near the finish line to get a better view of the start.

These were the people who had put up the nearly three hundred thousand dollars in that win pool. Just ordinary five and ten bettors, with a childlike confidence they would get a good run for their money.

Hoadley pouted like an injured kewpie. "That San Jacinto Stud entry really hasn't any right to be in a handicap like this. Hemet Boy's only finished once in the money, last three times out. Proper odds would be a thousand to one, unless that colt has been stimulated."

"Wouldn't guess it was dope," Keene watched an assistant starter wrestle with Tickalong to get the rangy gray gelding into his gate stall. "At last count there were eighty-seven different ways to rig a race. Probably more, when they take a new count."

Al shook his head, protestingly. "I don't get it, Madden. If you got an idea the same guy who framed the others is putting in the gimmick on this one, why didn't you report it to the stewards?"

"Counting on it being the same person," Keene told him. "Only dependable thing about fixers. No matter how many scores they make, they never get enough of that wonderful stuff. Can't resist the temptation to try for one more."

"Two hundred ninety-eight thousand

in the win pool." Sam grunted. "That's one worth trying for, isn't it? That's a lot of bucks for these people to get gypped out of. Without any chance to win, on account of some cluck refuses to go to bat to protect their interests. And ours!"

"Lot of jack," Keene agreed. "The whole take won't come through the mutuels, though, if the fix works. There'll be dough bet in all the little books—the barbershops an' poolrooms from Boston to Dallas, Denver to New Orleans. Wouldn't bring tote-board odds, but still it could bring in plenty."

The pre-start hush came over the huge crowd.

Enid drew in her breath sharply.

"You said the other races were fixed by jockey connivance. Are you accusing Stretch Wazey—"

"Think Stretch might!"—Keene looked at her face, pale under the sun-tan—"have something up his sleeve."

The roar that went up from the crowd was like the first thunder crash of a storm:

"They're off!"

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Fix



WIDE of the gate it's Lobbino by a half. Tickalong a head. Briskova dipped as he broke but recovered. Roda B on the rail. Coming into the clubhouse turn King's Pryde and Cheviotte are trailing by a length!" The announcer's voice was pitched high with excitement.

Nobody was paying any attention to the keyed-up group in the Hoadley box. In the rising roar from the stands, Keene's words couldn't have been heard five feet away:

"Stretch's had something up his sleeve for some time, if I'm right. He's been one of the main links in the chain, and who knew that better than you did, Enid?"

"No!" she cried sharply. But those in the adjoining boxes assumed her exclamation was at the drama down on the track.

"Rounding into the backstretch, it's

still Lobbino out in front by a length and a half, Tickalong a half, Hemet Boy coming through on the inside, Roda B, Briskova, King's Pryde and Cheviotte. Hymie Goldman is rating Lobbino along at a hot pace, Chick Vesser's beginning to bring Tickalong up—"

Enid's voice cut under the announcer's shrillness:

"You're a liar! I never knew about Stretch!"

"Yair. You did. Couldn't say whether you played around with him, way you did with your other joy friends. Probably not, because Johnny's dead and Hoo-Hoo's ditto, while Stretch is still alive."

"Wazey seems to be having trouble with Briskova! He's taking to the whip early. It's still Lobbino coming through the backstretch, with Roda B challenging Tickalong for second and Briskova, fourth!"

"You better be able to back up that stuff about my wife, Madden, Sam snarled, "or I'll break every bone in your body!"

"I'll back it up," Keene said. "She two-timed you, same's she did her first husband. She doublecrossed Hoo-Hoo, and after he died, she was even willing to smudge up his memory by letting the police believe he'd murdered Johnny—if they weren't ready to fall for your being the killer."

"—rounding the far turn, now. Lobbino's fading. It's Tickalong by a head, Lobbino, Roda B, Hemet Boy making his bid—and Briskova fifth!"

Enid spoke through her teeth: "I could kill you!"

"Don't doubt it." Keene kept his left hand, the good one, on her forearm. "Cut my throat with a dull knife, if you thought it'd save your own skin. Tried it a couple times last night."

"Judas, Madden!" Al had been touched where it hurt. "Realize what you're saying?" He pawed ineffectually at Keene's hand.

"Say I do."

"—coming into the stretch now, it's Tickalong by a half, Roda B, Lobbino, Hemet Boy, Briskova, Cheviotte and King's Pryde!"

"Should say I do," Keene repeated grimly. "She tried to gun me out this morning, at Sam's cottage. Because I was dumb enough to doubt that such a seductive sal would be cold-blooded

enough to kill three men she seemed to go for."

"Wazey's making his bid on Briskova! Tickalong's fading! It's Roda B, Hemet Boy, Tickalong... No!... here comes Hemet Boy on the inside! Lob-bino's out of it! It's Roda B, Hemet Boy, Briskova!"

The stands were bedlam. Programs waving, women jumping up and down in chairs, men in polo shirts leaning far out over the rail, and one high, hysterical scream from fifty thousand howling maniacs:

"Briskova! COME ON, BRISKOVA-VA!!!"

"It's Hemet Boy, a half, Briskova, a head, Roda B. It's going to be... Oh, oh! Wazey's really going to the whip now! Neck and neck! It's going to be—going to be Briskova! It's Briskova! Briskova, Hemet Boy, Roda B! This is not official! Please do not destroy your tickets until the judges have posted the results."

The stands were still a screeching pandemonium, the infield was erupting, grooms and valets, the official's station wagon was dusting along the track to the judges' stand.

Hoadley, his face flushed, held out his hand to Sam. Sam ignored it, thrusting his raw-hamburg face close to Keene's. "Fix, huh?" he growled. "Wazey's crooked, huh? Yah!"

KEENE didn't appear to be deflated any.

"Something wrong somewhere."

"In your head!" Al snorted.

"Uh, uh." Keene slid his hand down to Enid's handbag. "Wouldn't put it past her to have pulled a fast one on the people who were in it with her. Soon

find out. She'll have her tote tickets in here."

Enid fought him. "Take your hands off my bag!"

"Cut it out, now, Madden!" Al shouted. "Leave her alone!" He seized the handbag, too.

Keene wrenched it open.

She yanked it away. Its contents spilled out on the floor of the box. Tickets, fluttering. Purse, scattering coins and bills. Compact, lipstick — and a small, nickle-plated hammerless .32.

They all dived for it.

Al got it, crying: "Stan' back, Mad-den!"

Enid snatched at her father's wrist, wrestled with him.

Keene got his good hand around Al's fist. The three of them toppled against the back of the box, struggling.

Keene swung his right, feebly, up to Al's jaw. He hadn't counted on this interference. It only took a slight pressure of that trigger to blast a sizable hole!

The revolver went off with a dull, smothered *punnnh!* Al opened his eyes wide.

"Judas!" he gasped. "Judas Priest! You—you—"

A shiny red bubble emerged from his lips. He tried to sit down, fell on his face.

The Pinks closed in on the box, just as Stretch Wazey cantered Briskova into the winner's circle. . . .

The windows in the stewards office looked down on the weigh-out scales where, only a couple of hours ago, Stretch Wazey had faced a battery of clamoring newsreel photographers and television mikes.

[Turn page]

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Enid leaned against the window. "No," she said. I don't blame you. I guess you had to do it."

Keene watched the jeep towing the scraper around the track below.

"Best way—all things considered."

"How did you know?"

"Never did, really. Had to gamble. Either it was you, or him."

She began to cry again, quietly.

"If you weren't the killer," he said, "you had to know who was. Maybe you saw him at Johnny's?"

"No. But I suspected, then."

"Anyhow, you must have recognized him on the porch, there at Hoo-Hoo's. You told me he was silhouetted against the light. Of course he couldn't have been. The only light was from inside the bungalow. That's how I spotted you as having gone into Sixteen, in the first place, by seeing the shaft of light that came from the bungalow when the door was opened."

"Oh, yes. I saw him then, all right."

"Figured you'd battled with him."

Keene went over to her. "To keep him from finishing me off, then and there."

She shrugged, sniffled.

"So the murderer had to be somebody you'd have a terrific reason to protect or you'd have told me, when I came out to the cottage this morning."

She dabbed at her eyes with a soggy handkerchief.

"I never did really know my father was—Mr. Fix—until last night, though. Maybe you think I'm lying about that, too."

"Must have had some idea, from Johnny or Hoo-Hoo."

"No. Neither of them knew, until yesterday."

"Johnny'd been taking his bribes, right along, hadn't he? Same as Stretch, and a couple others?"

"I guess so. But it wasn't until Johnny found Dad fooling around with the silks Johnny was to wear in the seventh yesterday, that he began to figure it out." She held her chin high, to keep it from trembling.

Keene took the wadded ball of surgeon's tape from his pocket.

"Caught him sticking one of these strips to the underside of the blouse sleeve, hah?"

E NID recoiled as if the thing had been a scorpion.

"Where'd you get that?"

"Found it. On the floor. Beside Johnny's body. Thought he must have held onto it for some good reason. This was the way Al got his message through to the boys he'd discovered he could buy. Stuck one of these to the inside of the sleeve of the silks a rider was going to wear in the race Al was betting on." Keene touched the red silk thread.

She nodded. "That's what Hoo-Hoo told me. Father'd tried to get him in the ring, but Hoo-Hoo wouldn't have any part of it."

"How would Hoo-Hoo have known what the thing meant?" Keene said.

"Johnny told him. Johnny never admitted he was pulling his mounts or taking money for doing it, but he told Hoo-Hoo that some of the others were. That's the way Johnny got in on it. Stretch told him how to read the tape code."

Keene put the tape on the stewards' table, beside the stack of tote tickets. "Suppose that's what Hoo-Hoo wanted to see Hoadley for, wasn't it? To tell him what he'd found out about the corruption crew?"

"Yes." Enid paced the long room, distractedly. "You see, it hurt me when I found Johnny dead, of course. But I knew he was dishonest. I knew he always had been. That's one of the reasons we didn't get along."

"Yair. Sure. But Hoo-Hoo's murder hit you harder?"

"Much, much harder." She sobbed openly. "He was a leveler, always. A tough guy, but straight as a string. I wish there was some way the newspapers could be told that."

"Nothing easier, now. They'll just contrast him with Stretch Wazey."

"Stretch is—through?"

"But for keeps, Yair. If he's halfway bright, he'll change his name, go to South America or somewhere."

"That's what I meant to do if I'd collected on those things." She touched the stack of tickets on Number Six. "But it really was my own money I was betting."

"Sorry you had to lose it. But I couldn't let Stretch get away with it, that time. I wanted to shake Al's confidence in his own setup, make him give his hand away."

Enid didn't understand.

He tapped the strip of tape. "Wasn't much trouble to read this. SO Forty-

one—N Seventy-one—G Two—C. Al must've thought he was cute, breaking it up that way, with dashes. But once I forgot about those, it was clear enough. So Four—that would mean the Four entry—in Seven—if number Four comes in first in the seventh race, One G to C. Cady gets a grand."

She stared at him with something closely approaching awe.

"But I don't get it. About Stretch, I mean. I know my father meant for number Six to win the handicap today. I found a telegram that dropped from his pocket there on Hoo-Hoo's porch last night. It said to scatter five thousand around on Hemet Boy. So I knew what to bet on myself. But then, why did Stretch try so hard to win with Briskova?"

Keene smiled. "Maybe because the strip he found under the sleeve of the Shadowlawn silks wasn't the one Al stuck in there."

"Oh! You!"

"I had Lou Blossom look for Al's message, take it out, and stick in a substi-

tute. It went like this."

He scribbled with his underwater pen on one of the \$50 tickets:

SO 21—N51—5G2—W

"So, if Number Two wins in the fifth," she translated, "fifteen goes to Wazey!" "Sright."

"You're really wonderful! You are, honestly!" She gave him wide-eyed admiration. "You saw right through everybody, all the time!"

"Oh, sure," he said drily. "That's why I've got this slug in my shoulder! I saw right through your bedroom door, saw Al there, waiting to gun me! Oh, yair! Everything so transparent!"

"You understood *me*, easily enough." She moved closer, touched his arm. "Didn't you?"

"You?" He raised his eyebrows. "You're the one thing about the whole business I'd never understand." He tapped his shoulder. "Not that sometime, when this gets better, I wouldn't like to make a stab at it."



THE TEST OF DEATH!

PETE HAMLIN, automotive engineer, was busily engaged in making tests of his new and radically different auto motor—incorporating features that were top secrets. But interference, sabotage and the threat of murder blocked his progress—culminating on that terrible day when he found the body of his wife, Sheila, and realized she had been killed with his own gun . . . which had been stolen from him. . . .

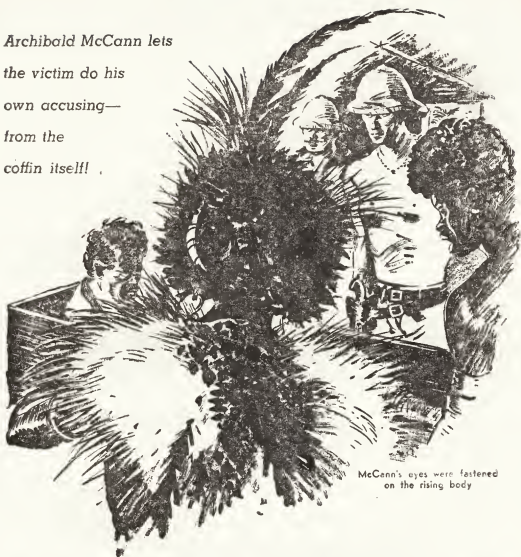
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*Archibald McCann lets
the victim do his
own accusing—
from the
coffin itself!*



McCann's eyes were fastened
on the rising body

THE UNKNOWN MURDERER

By M. D. ORR

ARCHIBALD Sylvester Brewster McCann snored in blissful contentment on his bunk in the native village of Tambu, in the foothills north of the city of Port Moresby, New Guinea. The late morning sun was making the jungle into a steam bath, and beads of perspiration on McCann's face

began to join each other and form tiny streams that ran down under his face and soaked his pillow.

His sleep was suddenly interrupted by several sharp slaps applied to the bottoms of his feet. His eyes popped open and he saw Jason French, Chief of Police and Native Commissioner of

the Port Moresby District, grinning down at him.

McCann and French had become inseparable friends during the years of the war. They had grown to admire and respect each other's ability to ferret out the complicated mazes of international intrigue and confusion incident to the war. However, McCann had no feelings of friendship just at that moment for French, because French's presence meant trouble. It always had.

"What in the devil are you doing up here?" he demanded irritably. "I thought I made it clear to you that I'm all through chasing spies and murderers."

"Come on, you long drink of water!" French grinned. "Get outta that bunk. Your house boy, Tegek, tells me you've been sleeping since yesterday afternoon."

"What time is it?" asked McCann, as he yawned sleepily.

"Ten o'clock. Time you're up."

"What's the idea of following me up here and busting in on my first vacation in five years?" demanded McCann as he swung his long legs over the edge of the bunk and rubbed his eyes slowly. "I never can get any sleep as long as you're any place around. Why don't you crawl off some place and die?"

"One of your neighbors was murdered last night," said French. "You probably know him. His name's Peters—Sid Peters."

"What?" McCann now was thoroughly awake. "Sid Peters?"

"I got a message saying that someone had beaten his brains out," said French.

"Who sent the message?"

"Peters' foreman—a fellow named Yonkers. He didn't give any details."

McCANN glanced up at French disgustedly, then rolled back into his bunk and pulled the mosquito canopy into place over him.

"Go 'way," he grumbled, and turned his back toward French. "I'm going back to sleep."

"I need your help, Mac," French said quietly. "This is a native matter, and you know the natives better than I do. They'll talk to you and they won't talk to me. I can't handle it alone. You know I wouldn't bust in on your vacation unless I had to, Mac. Come on, just this once, Mac. It won't take long,

and then you can go back to sleep and sleep the rest of your life, as far as I'm concerned."

McCann gave no indication that he heard. He didn't actually hear because his mind was swiftly reviewing the last five years of his hectic life in the New Guinea district. He felt that he had earned a vacation, and he was going to take it, regardless of the pleas of French.

McCann, anthropologist to his friends, beachcomber to his critics, undercover agent to the British Intelligence of New Guinea, and "good fella massa" to the natives, flopped his pillow over his head. He was stubbornly determined to divorce himself from the hectic and uncertain life of an undercover agent for the British Intelligence Service which he had been following since the beginning of the war. He hadn't come to New Guinea to be a detective.

He filled his lungs with the heavy fragrance of the jungle. He heard the distant throbbing of the native "talk-talk" drums as their soothing vibration pulsed through the jungle, and neither they nor the hungry whine of a lone mosquito buzzing around his uncovered nose disturbed him. But French's presence did.

He drew his nose further back under the pillow.

McCann had first decided to become a doctor, but after graduating from medical school and finding that the duties of a doctor were much too strenuous for his indolent nature, decided that law might be a less strenuous occupation. So he qualified as a lawyer. However, he had soon found that a lawyer's life was a continual round of mental disturbances and unnecessary chin exercise, so he had decided to seek a job that required the minimum amount of both physical and mental exertion.

After a careful review of all the possible occupations requiring the least amount of physical and mental energy, he concluded that the life of an anthropologist in the South Seas was as near to his conception of real living as any.

He bought a second-hand book on anthropology, skimmed through it one evening, then called on the director of an expedition that was about to depart for the Bismarck Archipelago in the Pacific. McCann had confounded him with

an unintelligible jumble of technical-sounding, spontaneously coined words, and much to his surprise had landed a job with the expedition.

He had built himself a crude shack in the native village of Tambu, had won the confidence of the natives and the alarm of the other anthropologists, who feared that he was going native. He had remained to help the British uncover subversive activities among the natives during the war, when the other anthropologists in the expedition had taken a hasty departure at the first sign of danger.

Now, after five years, he was back in the village of Tambu, ready to resume the role he had chosen as his life's work. And French wasn't going to talk him out of it.

When McCann had arrived at the village the afternoon before, Tegek, his house boy, had called his attention to the drum talk that was filling the jungle. "What drum say?" McCann had asked.

"Dis fellaman, called black-white," said Tegek, "him take number ten wife."

"Oh you mean the half-breed who has a lumber camp up in the hills? Yes, I remember him. Let me see . . . his name's Peters—Sid Peters. Lives up in the Devil's Hole valley. Yes, Sid Peters was always quite a lady's man."

"Him ketchum wife plenty too much," Tegek had said and grinned. "Him like plenty much change. Him ketchum wife—one, two, tree week, mebbe him no like wife no more. Him say to wife, 'go home now.' Wife go home. Wife's papa come, say to black-white, 'You pay me six pounds.' Black-white him pay papa six pound. Papa say, 'Hokay!' Now pretty soon papa come back, him say, 'Wife she ketchum baby long you.' Black-white him say 'Hokay' and pay papa 'nuther six pounds. Papa say 'Hokay' and go back home. Papa satisfied, black-white satisfied, mebbe wife satisfied—me no know."

"Maybe it wasn't Peters' baby," McCann had thought.

McCann smiled as he remembered how Tegek's eyes had twinkled as he said, "Mebbe no. But—could be."

FRENCH reached under the mosquito net and started to pull the pillow from McCann's head. McCann's long arms locked quickly around it.

"Listen, Mac," pleaded French, "I'm in a jam. Just look at it from my standpoint. We've always worked together and we've got places."

McCann threw the pillow off his head. "I didn't come to New Guinea to be a detective!" he snapped. "I came here to be an anthropologist. I've broken off being a detective. I'm through with it—the war's over. You might as well make up your mind right now to do your own work. I'm not going to help you, so go on away and let me sleep."

French glanced around the room. He saw a basket of dry twigs and walked over and picked up a handful. He lifted the edge of the mosquito net that fell to the floor at the side of the bunk, placed the twigs under the bunk, and struck a match to them.

McCann sniffed the acrid smoke as it curled up into his nostrils. He bounded out of the bunk and saw what French had done. He pawed the burning twigs from beneath the bunk and scattered them across the hard packed dirt floor. His eyes were blazing furiously.

"Why, you—" he began.

"Take it easy, Mac," French smiled. "You can't let me down after all we've been through together."

There was such a serious look of appeal in French's eyes that McCann hesitated, then began to scratch his nose and grin resignedly.

"All right, you old goat," he said with a shrug of his scarecrowlike shoulders. "Let's get it over with. . . ."

When McCann, French and the native police boys arrived at the Peters' camp, they found Ben Yonkers, the foreman, standing guard over Peters' body in the front room of his rambling camp house.

"They sure made an awful mess of him," said Yonkers as he indicated the crushed condition of Peters' skull.

Peters had been a short, swarthy man about five feet and a half in height. His face was scratched as though it had been dragged over rough gravel, and the back of his head that rested on the floor was a bloody mass of brains and blood. He was dressed in khaki shirt and pants, and was barefoot.

"Turn him over," McCann ordered Yonkers. "Where did you find him?"

"On the path coming up from the river," said Yonkers as he rolled Peters' body over on its face. "It was about

nine o'clock. I was in the office doing some work on the books when I heard someone shout down by the river. I didn't pay much attention to it until I heard a thudding sound like someone pounding on the ground. I went outside to see what was the trouble. It was pretty dark. I couldn't see much, but I thought I saw a man striking something that was lying in the path. I yelled, and the man disappeared. I ran down and found Peters just like you see him now. I brought him up here and sent for the police."

"Did you recognize the man who disappeared?" asked French.

"No I didn't. It was too dark."

"What about footprints?" asked French.

"Too many natives use the path," said Yonkers. "You wouldn't be able to see anything like that."

"Have you any idea who might have done it?" asked McCann.

"No, I haven't," said Yonkers. "Most of the natives liked him. He was almost one of them. Of course you know he had a native mother."

"Yeah, I know that," said McCann. "I understand that he had just recently taken his tenth wife?"

"How'd you know that?" asked French in surprise.

"I heard it," said McCann noncommittally, and turned back to Yonkers. "What about this tenth wife?"

"Well," Yonkers said thoughtfully, "I don't think that angle would enter into the case."

"I didn't ask you what you thought, Mr. Yonkers," said McCann. "I asked you to tell me about the tenth wife."

"Well, she's quite a young girl," said Yonkers. "Peters had his eye on her for some time. He has been trying to make a bargain with her father about the price to be paid for her. Her father wanted twelve pounds and Peters wanted to pay only the usual six, but they finally compromised at ten pounds."

"When did this all take place—that is, the final arrangement?" asked McCann.

"Yesterday."

"Had the girl come to live with him?" asked McCann.

"No. She was coming today."

"Where's her father now?" asked McCann.

"I guess he's over at his hut."

"Send for him," ordered McCann.

HE bent over Peters' back and casually inspected a small black splinter that was imbedded in the cloth of the khaki shirt. He took out his penknife, slit open the shirt, and exposed the splinter which had pierced Peters' back directly between his shoulder blades. The splinter had barbed edges and was covered with a brownish substance.

"Hm—blow-gun," McCann said and asked French to get him a pair of pliers.

French found a pair of electrician's pliers and gave them to McCann who carefully removed the blow-gun dart and held it up for French's inspection.

"Looks like the work of a native," he said.

"Might be the old man wasn't satisfied with ten pounds," suggested French.

"Don't think so," said McCann as Yonkers returned with Peters' new father-in-law.

"Here's Mambu," said Yonkers as he pushed into the room a native who appeared convulsed with fear.

McCann appraised the native carefully, then spoke to him in his native dialect.

"Do not be afraid, my friend," he said slowly and quietly. "I have come to find the man who killed Massa Peters. I will find him. I will smell him out of the jungle. I will smell him out of the river. Tell me, my friend, who killed Massa Peters, and I will give you protection against the evil one."

The old man peered at McCann. It was evident that he was partly blind.

"It sounds like the voice of good Massa McCann that speaks," he said, as he took a step forward. "It is a long time since these ears heard the voice of good massa."

"It is my voice that you hear, my friend," said McCann.

"What's he saying?" asked French.

McCann motioned for him to be silent.

"The old man was not the man who killed Peters," Yonkers said. "He's nearly blind and he can't run. Besides he and his family were having a wedding feast at their home at the time of the murder." He also addressed the old native in dialect. "Old man, tell us if you suspect anyone?"

"It is as great a mystery to me as to you," replied the old man, and shook his head sadly.

"What'd he say?" asked French.

"If you'd learn the native language, you'd know without having to ask," said McCann briefly.

"That's what I keep you for." French grinned. "But you might let me in on what's going on. Speak to him in pidgin English.

McCann shrugged and spoke in pidgin English to the native.

"No fella stop long house belong you tommyhawk Massa Peters?" he asked.

"No, Massa."

"Mebbe you smellum out fella belong tommyhawk."

"Me no ketchum smellum."

"You ketchum know how Massa Peters die?"

"Bashum head long tommyhawk."

"That certainly isn't the pidgin English I know," said French disgustedly.

"That's the only kind he knows," said McCann, "and he doesn't know anything about the murder."

"I've made inquiries all over," said Yonkers, "and there isn't a single clue that I can find. I'm positive that the old man didn't do it, neither does he know who might have done it. I doubt if he would tell if he did know."

"You're up against a tough proposition," McCann told French. "One native will not tell on another. That's the first obstacle. Peters was killed by a blow-gun dart, and then his head was bashed in. There are thousands of blow-guns among the natives. If we did find any fingerprints we'd have to fingerprint the entire district in order to find out who the fingerprints belong to. You have nothing here that will fit into the regulation police methods of solving a crime."

"That's why I brought you along," said French.

"However, in order to make a showing," said McCann "let's proceed with your regulation Hawshaw, private eye, slick sleuth, or omniscient crime doctor method and see if we can find out who killed Peters. You'll have to satisfy the brass hats, you know."

A thorough and complete investigation was made of Peters' death according to the tried and accepted methods of police procedure. But, as McCann had

predicted, not a single clue recognized by such methods was uncovered.

The first signs of the quick night that would soon blanket the jungle became evident in the plaintive call of the night birds. French didn't want to spend a night in a rat-infested and malaria-ridden native village. He was satisfied that Peters' murder could not be solved, and wanted to go home.

DURING the investigation, Yonkers had drawn McCann's unqualified approval of the manner in which he had handled the natives. Yonkers was a small man, not over five feet four inches in height. He had smiling blue eyes and curly blond hair. But behind his smile lurked a firmness that was evident when he requested the natives to perform some act that was a little repugnant to them. However the natives appeared to respect and like him. They exhibited a natural freedom of expression when they talked to him and appeared to trust him.

As McCann, followed by Yonkers and French, entered the small office after they had completed their investigation, Yonkers said:

"The natives will be holding their funeral pow-wow for Peters tonight."

"I've got to get back to town," said French.

"You'll get eaten alive by mosquitoes," said McCann. "I'll let you stay at my country palace—if you aren't too particular."

"Everybody's coming for the pow-wow," said Yonkers.

McCann turned and looked at him thoughtfully for a moment.

"I've never seen a native funeral service," he said slowly. "I think it might be very, very interesting."

"I don't," said French. "I'm going back."

"Chief French and I will stay and see the funeral," said McCann. "I'm sure he'll do that much for an old friend. Won't you, Jason?"

French started to protest, but only mumbled as he saw the warning look in McCann's eyes.

"I've had the women prepare supper for you at Peters' house," said Yonkers. "I think it's about ready."

"That sounds good to me," said McCann, and started over to the house on the opposite side of the clearing.

After they had eaten, McCann and Yonkers went back to the office. French sat on the screened-in porch and smoked his pipe. He could see McCann and Yonkers inspecting the rough box in which Peters had been placed for burial. They were fixing handles on the side of the box so that it could be carried more easily.

"A foolish waste of time and energy," thought French.

The native drums began their weird throbbing. The jungle seemed to be filled with the pulsing vibrations of endless percussions. McCann came back to the house.

"Let's go down to the house tambarin (native temple)" he said. "The natives generally put on quite a show when they have an affair like this."

"I thought they only held funerals for their own people," said French, as they started up the trail to the temple. "He is part native," McCann reminded him.

"Where's Yonkers?" asked French.

"He has to wait for the men who are going to carry the body to the temple," said McCann. "He'll come later."

The quick tropical night had fallen when they reached the temple. Guards with grotesque and weird-looking head masks stood at the entrance. The throbbing of the drums within the temple seemed timed to the beating of the human heart. Sputtering, smoking torches of fat-wood flickered in the smoke-filled temple.

Not a word was spoken as they passed into the temple. They felt everyone's eyes upon them.

A tall angular medicine man in the regalia of his station stood in front of a long thick plank table at the far end of the room. Suddenly the drums stopped—then began again, this time in a slow, deathlike cadence that filled the temple with vibrations that seemed to shake everything within it.

The medicine man moved slowly toward McCann and French, his terrifying head mask glaring at them balefully. They moved quickly to one side as he passed them and took a station at the entrance of the temple. Then all was silent. Only the breathing of the old men could be heard.

Not even a single mosquito invaded the sacred precincts of the temple. The pungent smoke from the torches kept

them out. The men at the drums waited expectantly, their hands poised above the skin-covered heads of the drums.

At a signal from the medicine man the drums burst into a wild rhythm. A dozen or so masked dancers leaped from their places at the sides of the temple and began a furious dance consisting of high leaps and cork-screw gyrations and sudden forward and backward dashes. The rough box casket with Peters in it came slowly through the doorway. Eight husky natives, masked and clad in feathered regalia bore the casket toward the table at the far end of the temple.

The casket was carried by, close to McCann and French. French unconsciously drew back as he saw the deathlike pallor of Peters' face and his staring eyes so close to him. He shuddered involuntarily. He wished he had gone home.

McCANN touched him on the arm and motioned for him to sit down on one of the plank seats at the side of the temple.

The men carrying the casket set it carefully on the long table. The medicine man walked to the table and held his hand up for silence. The drums were silent and the dancers returned to their positions at the sides of the temple.

The medicine man launched into a long speech that McCann didn't understand. It was the special dialect of the medicine men. It was evident however that he was extolling the virtues of the dead Peters. There was a certain rhythm to his speech, a tonal quality of euphony that was pleasant to hear.

As he talked, French suddenly grasped McCann's arm fiercely and pointed toward the casket. At the same instant a startled "Wah!" swept over the audience. There was a movement in the casket. Peters' head was slowly but surely arising from the casket. The flickering light of the torches made his face grimace and his open eyes appear to blink rapidly.

The medicine man turned and faced the casket. A startled grunt came from inside his head mask. He backed away, his hands upraised as if to ward off an attack.

A throaty hollow voice came from the slowly rising body, speaking in the

native dialect of the district.

"I have come back from the night," it said. "I have come back to speak to you and tell you the things that you would like to know."

Peters' body was rising with arms supporting it at the sides of the casket. A hypnotic spell held the audience in a deathlike trance.

"He's come back to life!" gasped French.

McCann did not answer. His eyes were fastened on the rising body. He appeared ready to dash out of the temple.

There was a quick stir among the natives. "I have come back to point out the man who killed me, first with a poisoned dart and then crushed my head and left me in the night to die among the evil spirits," the voice continued. "Watch you well my accusing finger. It will point out and name the one who killed me."

"Wah!" swept through the audience as the right hand of the corpse started to move from the side of the casket.

There was a commotion at the doorway followed by yells and a violent struggle. McCann leaped for the doorway as the corpse slowly sank back into the casket.

"Bring him into the temple!" McCann called.

A struggling native, firmly held by police boys, was dragged into the temple and taken toward the casket. He was wild-eyed with terror. Froth came from his chattering mouth as he surged violently in the secure grip of the police boys who forced him toward the casket.

Suddenly he went limp, but the police boys did not relax their hold. They held him upright beside the casket. McCann motioned for the medicine man to approach, which he did reluctantly.

McCann held up his hand for silence. It was several minutes before he was able to calm the frightened natives. The captive native's eyes rolled grotesquely and he jabbered incoherently.

"You have seen, my friend," McCann said to the natives in dialect, "the dead return to life and point out the man who murdered him. This man has confessed his guilt by trying to escape the finger of the dead." He turned to the cringing native. "Are you ready to confess your dark deed?" he asked.

The native refused to speak, whether from fright or stubbornness, McCann was unable to determine. He turned toward the casket and addressed the body of Peters.

"Arise again, oh, dead man!" he said in a loud voice. "Arise and point thy finger at the man who killed you."

Peters' body began to rise again, slowly and grimly. The native boy fell to his knees and began to froth at his mouth again, then suddenly admitted that he had killed Peters. Gasps of astonishment swept through the audience, and the police boys jerked the native to his feet and rushed him out of the temple.

McCann walked over to the casket and lifted Peters' body out of the casket. Yonkers, red-faced and perspiring, climbed out of the casket. There were other gasps of astonishment from the audience, followed by excited chatter and "Wahs!" of delighted approval. All natives loved dramatic incidents, especially one such as they had just witnessed.

FRENCH rushed up to McCann.

"Well by the Lord Harry," he exclaimed, and beamed delightedly, "that's one way to find a murderer! Who is he?"

"I don't know," said McCann. "Let's go out and find out who he is."

"You dont know?" marveled French.

"Not any more than you do," said McCann.

He led the way out of the temple to the place where the police boys were holding the native.

"I should have known it would be Nyamu," said Yonkers as he saw the native. "He was in love with the girl Peters just bought for ten pounds. They were going to be married, but he didn't have the necessary property to give for her. I'd forgotten about him. Thoughtless of me."

"We couldn't have made him confess," McCann reminded Yonkers. "Natives won't talk unless they're scared into it. You just can't beat a native and make him talk."

"Why don't you let me in on these pet schemes you hatch up?" asked French.

"Well, if the murderer hadn't tried to slip out of the temple—just as we expected he would—when Peters' ghost was about to point him out," said Mc-

Cann, "my scheme wouldn't have worked. If I'd told you about it and it hadn't worked, then you would have kept throwing my bum idea up to me the rest of my life."

French turned to Yonkers. "You certainly had more nerve than I would have had," he told him admiringly. "Imagine—having a dead man lying on top of you in a casket! But, you had me fooled—darned if you didn't."

"We had to let your police boys in on our plan," said McCann. "But, being natives, they saw the dramatic possibilities and played their parts mighty well."

"Everybody know everything but me," protested French in mock anger. "You're giving me an inferiority complex."

"You did a fine job, Yonkers," said McCann. "A mighty fine job."

"A nasty job, I'd say," said French. "How could you stand the stench?"

"Well, it was a bit smelly," admitted Yonkers, "even with the canvas sheet between us."

"And that voice—such a voice!" said French. "Hollow, just like a voice from the dead. Yonkers, you should go on the stage."

"I only talked into a hollow gourd," explained Yonkers.

"Yonkers," said French as he slapped the man approvingly on the shoulder, "from now on, I'll let McCann sleep as much as he wants to. I won't need him any more. You're my man from now on."

"Sez you." McCann grinned. "Yonkers is going to help me catch up on my anthropological notes that I've been neglecting the last five years while I've been helping you out of your messes. . . . Coming, Jason? I'm going home and get some sleep."



The "Inside" of Detective Work

5. Identifying the Body

IDENTIFICATION of unknown bodies is often an important part of a detective's work.

All unknown dead are photographed in the same way as criminals—that is, both front and profile views. Various tricks, such as the use of wigs, elaborate makeup, and even glass eyes, are employed to reconstruct bodies that have become partially decomposed, and to render them as lifelike as possible before photography.

Teeth, and the dental work that has been done on them, are often valuable clues in establishing identity. Charts and records are almost always kept by dentists. Teeth, incidentally, are the hardest and most durable part of the body.

The height of a person can be determined with fair accuracy even when only a few bones of his body have been found. The thigh bone, for example, multiplied by 3.7, will give a detective the height of a man's body. One to one-and-a-half inches should be added to the length of the whole skeleton to get the true height of the living person.

The race of a skeleton can sometimes be determined from its skull, but frequently not even then. The color of skin is only skin-deep.

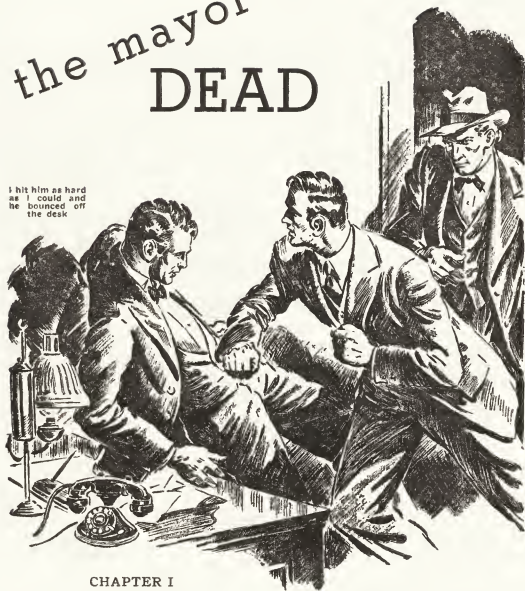
Fingerprinting dead bodies often leads to prompt identification—for the fingerprints of millions of persons are on file in Washington and elsewhere.

Laundry and dry cleaning marks are among the first things a detective notes. It often pays, too, to examine jewelry carefully. "Scratch marks" put on jewelry by manufacturers are frequently an aid in identification.

—Carlier Critz.

the mayor is DEAD

I hit him as hard
as I could and
he bounced off
the desk



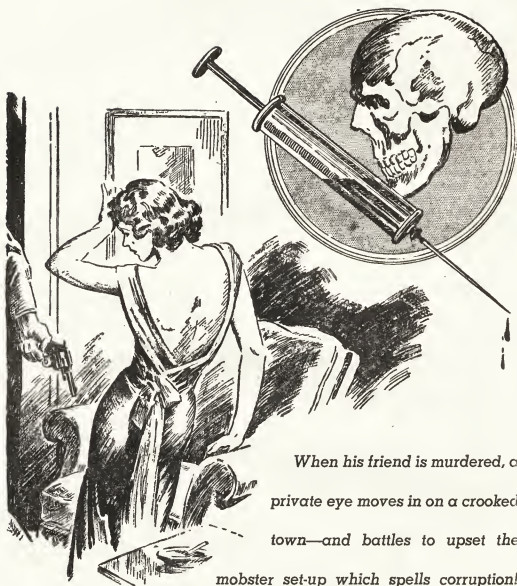
CHAPTER I

Mike Moves In

WHEN I drove into Jefferton it was just past noon. The city was dirty and weather-beaten, with long grimy rows of cheap tenements and lines of frayed wash flapping in the wind. There was one modern business street with some fine shops, but

surrounding this were blocks of second-rate stores and run-down hotels.

There was one modern hotel, the Jefferton Plaza. I took a room there, got shaved, and had dinner in the dining room. After that I drove down to the Jefferton National Bank. There I rented



*When his friend is murdered, a
private eye moves in on a crooked
town—and battles to upset the
mobster set-up which spells corruption!*

A Mike Dobson Novelet by B. J. BENSON

a safe deposit box big enough for my State Police credentials, my private license, my .38 Colt Detective Special and shoulder holster. I put them all in.

I trundled my car down to the smoke-colored railroad station and called my office long distance. They promised I'd

have the cards and forms by morning. I hung up and headed back uptown.

I hit smoke shops with slot machines; betting parlors; poolrooms that ran books and sold marihuana. I chummed up a few people and spoke to a drowsy young blonde at a frowsy old bar. I

refused her offer to see some etchings.

When it got dark I drove back to the hotel. In the lobby I spotted the house dick leaning against the cigar counter. He was a dapper little man with a smart suit and a hard eye.

I went over to him and said: "My name's Dobson. Room Four-thirteen. You're the house detective."

"Yeah," he said. "How'd you know?"

"I know," I said. "Come on, I'll buy you a drink at the bar."

"I ain't supposed to drink with the guests, mister. 'Course if it's business—"

"It's business." I opened my hand, showing a folded ten spot. He shook hands with me and snagged it.

"Let's go," he said.

He ordered a Haig and Haig Pinch Bottle double without soda that cost me a dollar and a half. I had a whisky sour.

"Okay," he said as he downed it, "what's the gimmick?"

"How's that?"

"Come on, come on. What do you want? A girl? Good gambling spot? Sniff of coke?"

"I don't need you for that. I want information."

HE BROUGHT out a cigarette and lit it, but didn't offer me one.

"You'll get ten bucks worth," he said. "I'll let you know when you've asked enough."

"Fair enough," I said. "I represent the Footwear Research Institute."

"The what?"

"Footwear Research Institute. We conduct polls on the wearing of shoes. Similar to the Gallup Poll. We take a cross section of people, so many in each town. Find out how much they walk each day, what their occupation is, and all that. From our survey the shoe manufacturers plan what type of shoe to make."

"Yeah?" His eyes narrowed and he sniffed suspiciously. "You're a big boy, too big to be fooling with that kind of stuff. And your nose has a dent in it. You look like you've been in the ring."

"Football," I said. "But in the line. All work and no glamour. Now, what I want to know is, how's the town on house-to-house interviewing? Do I need a permit?"

He blew smoke in my face. "Yeah. See Gravelpants Munn down at Police Headquarters. The permit is half a buck.

Sweetening's ten bucks more."

"Nice town," I said.

"Nobody asked you to come here, mister."

"By the way, what's this about the mayor being murdered last week? All the papers in the state are raising the devil about it."

"Look, Mr. Dobson. You worry about shoes. The mayor is dead. That's all."

"And nobody knows who did it or why."

"He's dead. That's all, brother."

"But the guy just took office two weeks ago. What's his name . . . Bell? That's it, Bell. Mason Bell. He wasn't even in office long enough to *make* any enemies."

His eyes glinted and he got off the high leather stool. "You've had your ten bucks worth, mister, and here's a little tip for you free. Don't ask too many questions in this town. It ain't healthy."

He went quickly out of the bar. When he got to the lobby he went over to the desk clerk. I saw them checking through the register. . . .

I got up early the next morning and went down to the desk. My graphs and charts were in from my agency in a big package marked "Footwear Research Institute." I bought a paper and looked at it. Bell was out of the headlines. There was two columns on his slaying halfway down the front page in a medium spread.

NO CLUES IN BELL MURDER

POLICE BAFFLED

I went into the dining room, wrapped myself around some bacon and eggs, then drove down to Police Headquarters.

It was an ancient brick building with dirty flyblown windows. Inside was an outdated high desk with a rickety railing in front of it. There was the smell of stale cigar smoke and old furniture.

"I want a house-to-house permit," I said to the unshaven, bald-headed desk sergeant. He had on a stained blue tunic with tarnished gold stripes, and dirty gray civilian pants.

"You one of these peddlers?" he asked.

"No. This is research work." I showed him the charts.

He yawned. "Go upstairs and see Captain Munn. License Bureau."

I went upstairs.

"Gotta use my own discretion on cases

like this," said Munn. He had a beefy face, red with drink. He leaned back and leered at me. "Gotta watch out for con men and protect the citizens."

I gave him ten dollars.

"Police Fund," I said. "You can send the receipt."

I went out with the pink slip that cost me fifty cents more. . . .

The house was set back a little from the street. It was a little Cape Cod colonial, painted white, and with black shutters. The lawn had been nice once, but was now unkempt. It was 1525 Wilbur Avenue, and it was the home of Mrs. Mason Bell.

I went up the flagstone walk and rang the bell.

Across the street I noticed a black coupe with a twisted short-wave aerial. There was a man sitting on the front seat. He had law written all over him.

I could hear footsteps clicking in the hall and the door opened.

She startled me. She was only about thirty-three but looked fifty. She had once been pretty, but now her face was a slate-gray and her black hair was straggly. She was tall and painfully thin and her housedress wasn't too clean. Most of all, her eyes bothered me. They were wild. She stared out at me with pupils like pinpoints; eyes that were fastened on me, yet weren't.

WHEN I pushed in, she didn't say anything. She followed me into the living room. I turned and faced her. "Marian," I said. "It's Mike Dobson. You remember me. I grew up with Mason. We were kids together."

She stood there staring right through me. She sighed and turned her head away. I took hold of her hands. They were like damp dish rags.

"Remember Center City?" I said. "The old jalopy I had?"

She stood mute. I tried again.

"I've come to help, Marian. I've come to find out who killed Mason. There's nothing to be afraid of any more."

She shuddered and I felt myself grow cold inside. Then I noticed the deadness of her skin and her eyes again. I grabbed her arm and pulled the sleeve up. I saw the tiny punctures on her upper arm. I went into the hall where I had seen the phone.

"Emergency," I said to the operator. "Mrs. Mason Bell. Fifteen-twenty-five

Wilbur Avenue. Narcotic poisoning. Get an ambulance here in a hurry."

I went back to the living room, led her to the divan, and went into the strewn bathroom. There were no spirits of ammonia. As I returned to the living room the door bell rang. I opened the door.

He was well past middle age, with silvery hair under a battered hat. He had a long beanpole body and his face was heavily lined. He flashed a nickle-plated buzzer.

"Stevens," he said. "Captain of Detectives. I was in the radio car across the street. I got the emergency flash."

He moved in and his hands patted me.

"Never mind the frisk," I said. "Mrs. Bell is sick. I think it's narcotic poisoning."

We went into the living room. He lifted one of her closed eyelids, grunted something, and turned to me.

"How'd you know it was dope?" he asked.

"I've seen it before."

"What's your racket, son?"

"No racket," I said. "I'm conducting a survey. I called on Mrs. Bell. I saw she was sick."

I showed him the charts and the pink permit. His face was impassive.

"Munn gives those to anybody who drops ten bucks on the floor," he said.

"I've seen you before."

"I don't think so. I'm new in town."

"I never forget a face and seldom a name." He thought for a moment. "Your name is Dobson or Dobman. Last time I saw you was at an F.B.I. school a year after the war. You had just got out of the Army. You gave a lecture on insurance frauds. Good, too."

"Thanks," I said. "The name's Dobson. Mike Dobson."

"Yes—Dobson," he said. "Private investigations. Big gun in Massachusetts. Glad to see you again. On business here. Mr. Dobson?"

"Yes, Captain. Working on a case."

"Good cover up, that survey business. Legal?"

"Yes. Registered and copyrighted."

"No use asking you what you're working on. Confidential, I suppose."

"Sorry. I don't trust anybody, Captain."

"Funny your case should bring you in this neighborhood so soon after the Bell killing. It's not the Bell case, Dobson?"

"No."

"Funny, just the same." He fished into his pocket and brought out a stubby briar pipe. "Maybe," he said. His voice had become hard, metallic. "Maybe they brought you in to muddy it up."

"They? Who are *they*, Captain?"

"I'm not afraid to mention names, Dobson. *They* is the Fusion Party. The Sevard-Conge-Wheeler clique. The gang Bell licked when he got elected mayor. The political gang that ran the city for four years and ran it right into the ground."

"I've heard of them," I said. "The smell reached right out of the state. Sevard, Ralph Sevard. Owns the industries and the newspapers. Wheeler, who was mayor and errand boy. Conge, who ran the town and pulled the strings. They called themselves the Fusion Party. I don't think I'd care to take their money. You're wrong there."

"Maybe I am wrong. You look tough, but you look clean and fairly honest, and, if I remember right, you've done some good work in Center City."

"Clean work, Captain. No divorce work and no politics. I didn't have to get down and wallow around in the mud. Sometimes a cop has to."

HE SHOOK his head.

"Not all cops. I've been a cop forty years. Politicians said I had a funny habit of stepping on people's toes. When Sevard brought Conge in four years ago, they moved me right out of Homicide. Put me in charge of Records and Identification. Some day, I said, if I wait long enough, I'll see a fairly clean town. I thought that day had come when Mason Bell got elected mayor. He moved me right back into Homicide. It sure was funny."

"What made it so funny?"

"He put Mapes in as Chief. Mapes was in Traffic. There was a deal made somewhere. But anyway I went back to Homicide. This is my first case since then. It'll probably be my last. You know what the papers are saying."

"You could have always joined the big parade, Stevens," I said. "You could have climbed the gray train."

"Yes." He smiled. "I guess I could have. But you're looking at a freak, son. An honest cop in a crooked city. Don't laugh. There are a few of us. And that's about the funniest kind of freak there is. But I guess a fellow has to live with

himself. And he's got to live with his wife, after thirty-eight years of marriage. Kate would get pretty mad—in fact, she'd walk out on me if I hopped over to the other side of the fence. I'd sure look funny getting divorced at my age."

CHAPTER II

Murder Number Two



HEARD the siren wail in the distance. I went to the front door and opened it. The ambulance swerved over to the curb and stopped. A white-coated intern hurried up the walk with a black bag in his hand. People began to look out of doors and windows and a small

knot of kids gathered on the sidewalk.

A white prowler car came up and one of the cops got out. He watched the ambulance driver and the helper bring the stretcher up. He followed them. When he saw Captain Stevens he hesitated, then saluted carelessly. Stevens snapped at him and he went back and cleared the sidewalk.

In the living room the intern opened his bag and shot something into Mrs. Bell's arm. The ambulance men put her on the stretcher and rolled her down to the ambulance. The intern turned to Stevens. "I'm not sure," he said, "but I think she'll pull out of it all right."

He went down the walk again and got into the ambulance. The siren wailed again. Stevens closed the door.

"Where'd Bell get knocked off?" I asked him.

"Right outside on that flagstone walk. It was eleven o'clock at night. His wife found him with his throat cut. Nothing was found, no weapon, nothing."

"That's tough."

He reached into his side pocket and brought out a worn tobacco pouch. His gnarled fingers expertly tamped an aromatic blend into the pipe bowl.

"It sure is funny, the whole business," he said. "Now it looks like somebody's moved in close to the new Governor. Pearson and Lang, the two State cops on the case, were pulled off this morning."

"Maybe nobody wants the case solved," I said.

"Maybe. Maybe somebody does. So far I'm satisfied the way it's going. In a case like this there are a lot of angles and it all depends what you're looking for. An opportunity to smear somebody so that the people never get a decent administration, that's one thing. So sometimes solving a case solves nothing in the long run. I'm sitting back just a little. I'm in no great hurry yet."

"Well, I am, Captain," I said. I went to the front door and opened it. "I wish you luck. I hope things work out the way you want them."

"So long, Dobson," he said. "If you ever want to team up, let me know."

"What do you mean?"

He smiled. "I just happened to remember that Bell originally came from Center City. Of course, it could be just one of those funny coincidences again."

The Jefferton Memorial Hospital was on Branch Avenue. I got past the reception desk and up to the fifth floor. The nurse on duty was young and her nice legs didn't belong in severe white stockings and flat white shoes. The name plate on the desk said Miss Frisbee.

It was eleven A. M. An hour had gone by since I'd left Stevens.

"How's Mrs. Bell?" I asked.

She smiled, showing white teeth. "Mrs. Bell is resting comfortably. She's in Room Three."

"I'd like to see her," I said, flashing the visitor's slip.

She shook her head. "Sorry, Mr. Dobson. The doctors said no visitors."

I started down the corridor to Room Three.

She ran after me.

"Mr. Dobson!" she cried plaintively. "Those are the orders."

The door to the room was partly open. I pushed it all the way back and went in.

The room was small and bare, with gray walls, a white metal bed, and a small white chest of drawers. The bed was rumpled and the sheets tangled. She was lying half out of the bed with her head dangling near the floor. I said her head was dangling. It was almost severed from her body. Her throat had been cut wide and deep and the blood had run out. Her long black hair was meshed into the pool of crimson on the linoleum. Her eyes were wide open and her mouth

was a twisted, tortured monstrosity.

Behind me, Miss Frisbee shrieked. The scream jarred me loose from my thoughts. I turned and grabbed her.

"When's the last time you were in here?" I asked.

"Twenty minutes ago," she sobbed. "She couldn't have done it to herself. We made sure. There was nothing in the room."

"She didn't. There's still nothing in the room. There's no weapon."

"But who—"

"Anybody come by here? Answer me! You were at the desk the whole time."

"No, I wasn't at the desk. We're so short of help I have seven rooms to take care of. I was with Mrs. Grady—a post operative case—in Room Seven. I was there most of the time. Oh, what am I going to do, Mr. Dobson? What am I going to do?"

"Nothing. I'll do it. Where's the phone?"

"Back at the desk, Mr. Dobson."

I went back and called Captain Stevens at Police Headquarters. . . .

I WAS in the Homicide office looking out the window at the city of Jefferton. It was late afternoon and on the roof of an adjoining building some pigeons rose and flapped around, then settled down again. Stevens got up from behind his desk and came over to me. His face was haggard.

"Nothing," he said. "A million people in and out of the hospital. Nobody knows anything. Nobody saw anything."

"Something will turn up," I said.

"Maybe," he said. "I guess that's all for now, Dobson. Stick around town for a few days."

"I'll be here. But tell me—what about the dope in her?"

"I found the set-up in her bedroom after you left. Her prints were on the hypo needle. She was taking the stuff herself."

"Where'd she get it? What about the Treasury boys? The stuff's floating all over town."

"Easy. If somebody has connections the stuff can be gotten legitimate. This is a town with a lot of connections."

"Nice town," I said.

I picked up my hat and went out, pushing past a reporter from the *News-Herald*. Outside, it was getting dark. I

drove back to the hotel.

In my room I looked around. My bag, which I had placed so carefully on the rack, had been moved. I opened it up. It had been searched. The lining had been ripped and my things had been gone through expertly and put back carefully. I went to the closet door and opened it. My suit was there, but the hanger had been moved a little. I pulled a bottle out of the desk drawer and poured myself a stiff drink.

There was a knock at the door.

He filled the doorway. He was a good six-feet-three, two hundred and fifty pounds, and not much fat. His smooth pink face was closely shaved and he had pale blond, wavy hair brushed back over a high smooth forehead. He was carefully groomed, wearing an imported tweed suit and pebble-grained brogues. He wasn't more than forty years old.

"My name's George Hartlett," he said, and reached out and shook my hand vigorously.

I invited him in. He sat down on a lounge chair near the window and refused a drink.

"From what I've heard of you, Mr. Dobson," he said, "I expected a much older man."

"I'm thirty-four, Mr. Hartlett," I said. "Six-one and two hundred pounds. Unmarried. Is there anything else you want to know?"

He grinned broadly. "No offense, Mr. Dobson. I thought we'd have a little chat, seeing we're engaged in the same profession."

"You're in the survey business?"

He grinned again. "I run the Hartlett Detective Agency, the biggest agency in this part of the state. I made it my business to look you up. I've heard of you before, Dobson."

"That's just dandy," I said. "Everybody seems to have heard of me. But I haven't heard of you, Hartlett. Are you in the Association?"

"There have been difficulties," he said.

He took out a silver cigar case and offered it. I shook my head. He took a cigar out and lit it. He puffed for a moment.

"The Association turned down my membership," he said. "A few irregularities."

"I know what you mean," I said. "You're in the dirty end of a dirty business."

"Your frankness is refreshing. I believe in frankness, Dobson. I'm going to put my cards on the table. I know why you're here, and I think we can make a little deal."

"Go ahead. You're dealing."

"I can help you, Dobson. You've come here to crack the Bell killing. Now there are two of them. You have no sources of information here, no contacts. I have."

"Suppose you tell me more."

"I'll tell you, because you'll find out anyway. I've been tied in with Ralph Sevard and John Conge. I've done work for them. Some of it—as you say—was dirty; some of it downright unpleasant. I think, frankly, it's all going to cave in. I want to get out from under."

"Keep going," I said.

"Killing is a nasty business. I was willing to go along with the rest of it, but now I want out. I'm willing to co-operate with you. I have a good organization, and I know things you'll never find out yourself. Of course, it will mean sticking my neck out and I'll want some protection. I want the people behind you to cover me when this whole thing breaks."

"There's nobody behind me, Hartlett."

"Very well, let it go at that. Let's say then, I have respect for your reputation."

HE COULD not mistake the way I shook my head.

"I don't make deals, Hartlett. If you want to turn State's evidence and take a chance with the D.A., that's your business."

"That's the best you'll do?"

"Yes."

"All right. What do you want to know, Dobson?"

"I want to know who was in back of Mason Bell. What was his political organization? Why was a deal made to put Mapes in as Chief of Police?"

"Bell was D.A. of Somersworth County," he said. "He was the Better Government League's candidate for mayor. He was elected in the biggest sweep in the city's history."

"Who's the League?"

"Nobody and everybody. Thousands of little people—clerks, school teachers, store owners, factory workers. They donated nickels and dimes and quarters. Bell had no strings on him. He owed nobody a thing."

"Who ran with him?"

CHAPTER III

Town Bosses

"Henry Luther, as president of the city council. He's mayor now. He's clean. Lawyer and ex-member of the school committee. Personal friend of Bell's."

"What about Mapes?"

"Oh, he's not such a bad fellow. He was an inspector in the Traffic Division. A little slow upstairs, perhaps, but his hands were cleaner than most of them."

"Maybe he wasn't in any position to get much. What about Stevens? Why was he passed over?"

"That's where everybody got fooled. They expected a clean-up when Bell got in. Clem Stevens is honest, and he was passed over. The little folks were disillusioned and they began to mumble. There was no clean-up. Bell clammed up. Now Luther's clammed up."

"Why?"

"Politics," he said. "Deals. It gets the best of them. The streets of Hades are paved with the good intentions of would-be honest politicians."

"If a deal was made, why was Bell killed?"

"A man in politics has enemies. Bell was working at City Hall late that night. There was a rumor he was going to clean house, and there are a lot of grifters on the pay roll. It might have been anyone who had it in for him. I think it might have been somebody off the beam."

"And his wife?"

"That's why I think it was a crazy person."

"I see," I said. "Well, thanks, Hartlett."

"I hope you can trust me to go along with you, Dobson."

"As much as you trust me," I said.

"I don't get you."

"There's a small metal plate in the lobby of this hotel. It says the place is protected by the Hartlett Agency."

"Yes? What about it?"

"Just this. Tell your man, the smooth little house dick, to keep out of my baggage. So long, Hartlett. I'll see you around."



NEXT morning I was in the Jefferson National Bank Building. I went up to the seventh floor where the Conge Enterprises had a swank set of offices. There was enough rich carpeting to furnish a good-sized home. The blonde mahogany furniture and the pastel walls looked like an interior decorator's fancy job.

The receptionist at the switchboard was a redhead with a turned-up little nose, a shapely body, and a soft, translucent skin that had a healthy sheen to it. She was wearing a frilled Gibson blouse and a green gabardine suit that matched her big friendly eyes. She looked me over carefully, flicked her long eyelashes once, then opened her warr mouth and said:

"Yes, sir?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Conge."

Her eyebrows arched. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No."

"Sorry. Mr. Conge sees people by appointment only. If you'd care to leave your name and the nature of your business I can call you."

I laughed. "There's no time for that. I'd bet a Scotch and soda you let in people you know."

"Sometimes. But I don't know you, Mr.—"

"Dobson. Mike Dobson. And yours?"

"Valdina Foster, and don't laugh."

"They don't call you Valdina, do they?"

"Vallie. My father was a gambler. He named me after his favorite race horse. I guess I wasn't very lucky for him. He died broke. I guess they all do."

"Usually," I said. "Well, now we know each other. It wasn't hard, was it?"

"Whoa," she laughed. "You're a little too fast for me."

"I'm not usually that way," I said, leaning over. Her tight skirt was molded against a perfectly shaped thigh and she had beautiful, well-rounded legs. "I'm conducting a survey on footwear and I

NEXT ISSUE

A LAM TO THE SLAUGHTER

An Hilarious Willie Klump Howler

By JOE ARCHIBALD

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES

must see Mr. Conge. And apparently the only way I can, is for you to know me. Well, you know me now. I'm thirty-four, black hair, blue eyes, and look, I have all my teeth. In a pinch I can furnish three references, if you'll take relatives."

She laughed again. "You're cute. You must be a stranger in town."

"I am. I hope they won't shoot me for it."

Her eyes became serious. "It's not a very good town, Mike Dobson. Somebody should have let you know that."

"All right," I said. "You can tell me all about that tonight."

"I should say no, shouldn't I?"

"Yes, but you won't."

"I know it. I've always had a weakness for the big husky type." She scribbled an address on a slip of paper and handed it to me. "Tonight at eight?"

"Right."

"Now if you'll wait a moment, I'll see if Mr. Conge is busy."

She spoke into the switchboard piece and nodded to me.

"Go right in through the gate. He'll probably give me all outdoors for this, but it's worth it."

I went in. The private office wasn't as big as a hotel lobby but it was close to it. There were yards of thick luxurious carpeting and the walls were murals, well-done in nudes.

He sat behind a big white mahogany desk. He was alone. He was big, and he was hard, and he looked smart. His face had no expression. He was in his early thirties, with jet-black hair and a pale complexion. He had on a conservative dark blue suit that looked like big money.

"How do you do, Mr. Conge," I said.

I gave him my card and then the Footwear Research business. He wasn't impressed.

"Your name's Dobson," he said in a flat voice, as he looked at the card. I saw him lean his foot over a little and I knew there was trouble. "My shoes are custom made," he said. "We don't like strangers coming to Jefferton asking questions—any kind of questions. We don't like it at all."

The foot button had worked fast because I heard some scraping of footsteps on the thick carpeting behind me. I turned around. There were two of them.

"This punk is Dobson," said Conge, lighting a cigarette. "He's the guy who

was at Mrs. Bell's yesterday. He's the guy who found the body at the hospital. He gets around. See what he's carrying."

"Who's doing the looking?" I asked.

The one with the bullet-head and ape-like arms pushed me up against the wall.

"It's all right, chum," he growled. "We're the police."

THE other one laughed. He had a bashed nose and an ugly scar across one eye.

"Sure," said Bashed Nose as he pulled out a badge. "We're honest cops."

"Never mind the preliminaries," said Conge. "Go through his stuff, Sergeant Lopat."

I started to say something, and the bullet-head slapped me hard across the mouth. It began to trickle red. Sergeant Lopat put the badge back in his pocket and moved in. He was an expert. He put all my things on Conge's desk.

Conge went through my wallet.

"From Massachusetts," he yawned. "Who you working for?"

"Footwear Research," I said.

"Hit him again, Winn," said Conge. "Maybe he'll remind himself of something."

Winn grabbed me with his left hand, bunching my shirt and pulling me toward him. He balled his right hand and let one go. I tried to ride with it but he was holding me tight and I got it across the temple and went down. My head was spinning as I tried to get up. Winn kicked me viciously.

"Stay there," he said.

Conge turned to Lopat who stood there with a look of enjoyment on his face.

"He's stubborn," Conge said. "I can't stand a stubborn guy. Mark him up a little."

Lopat grinned and his small eyes lit up as he reached into a hip pocket and brought out a pair of brass knuckles. He put them on deliberately and came over.

"Get up," he said in a husky voice. "Get up on your feet."

I got up; tense, ready.

The buzzer on the desk sounded. Conge held up his hand as Lopat looked at him. His hand flicked the switch.

"What is it?" he said tonelessly.

"Mr. Seward is here to see you, sir." It was Vallie's voice.

"Send him in," said Conge. He looked over at me and then at the two detectives.

"Get the punk out of here."

"We can throw a charge at him," said Lopat. "We can sweat him downtown."

"No," said Conge, looking at me. "Saved by the bell, Dobson. You're a lucky boy. Whatever your pitch is, get out. Get out of town, and get out fast. Understand?"

I nodded. I went over to the desk and took my things. There was a door on one side of the room. Conge pointed to it.

"Take him through there," he said. "See that he leaves the building."

As I turned to go I got a peek at Sevard coming in. He was of medium height and about sixty. He had light sandy hair that was gray at the temples, and a small clipped mustache. He was carrying a light cane. He looked at my bloody face as I went out. He didn't seem much interested.

I was pushed into a private automatic elevator. As we went down Winn turned to Lopat and said:

"We can still give him a time."

"Forget it," said Lopat. "Conge said no." He turned to me. "If you're smart, chum, you'll get out of town right now and forget what happened. I wouldn't want to tangle with Conge again."

They let me off at the ground floor and watched me as I got into my car and drove away. I straightened my clothes out, wiped my mouth, then circled twice around the block and back to the same parking place. I went back into the building.

I entered the bank, went downstairs to the vault and opened my safe deposit box. I left the shoulder holster in there, but took out the gun and tucked it in my belt. I picked up the credentials, slid them in my pocket and came out. The bank guard pushed his mouth at the sight of my puffed lip.

I got back into my car, put the credentials under the floor mat near the clutch and hooked the .38 under the dashboard. Then I went down to Police Headquarters. I had a little trouble getting to Chief of Police Mapes, but I got in.

"Make it snappy," said Mapes. He wore a food-stained wrinkled uniform with gold stars on the shoulder straps. He had jowls like a turkey gobbler.

"I want to swear out a warrant against a man named Conge," I said, "and two of your men, Sergeants Lopat and Winn. Assault and battery."

HIS mouth dropped and he blinked a pair of moronic eyes.

"Sure there ain't a mistake?" he sputtered.

"No mistake. I was in Conge's office and they assaulted me."

"You must be new in town," he grunted.

"I am."

"On business?"

"Yes."

"Business all done?"

"No."

He scratched his head. "I think you'd better wind it up right now, young feller. If Mr. Conge don't like you, you ain't going to get any business, anyway. Not in this town."

"I've been told to stick around," I said. "I'm the one who found Mrs. Bell's body."

"Oh, you're the one who's been nosing around. Well, you can leave town pronto. I'll tell Stevens I okayed it."

"All right. What about the complaint?"

"Forget it."

"I don't want to forget it. I'm new here, but from where I come from cops don't push the citizens around."

"Oh, I'll give them a real talking to, don't you worry about that. Now I tell you what. You be a nice feller and run along. Besides, I ain't got nobody that'll serve a warrant on Mr. Conge. Sure as sin I ain't. No sense kicking up a fuss and getting him mad at us. Of course," he added, as his eyes grew cunning, "if you're going to be mean about it and kick up a rumpus we have ways—"

"Don't get subtle on me, Chief," I said. "I know what you mean. Maybe I'll forget the whole thing."

"Now you're sensible," he said.

I left his office and went into the corridor that smelled strongly of cheap disinfectant. I saw Clem Stevens going into his office. When he saw me he stopped and looked at my face.

"Bumped into two members of your sterling Police Force," I said. "It's a nice town you have here."

He looked at me sadly. "I told you to stick close to me," he said, as he walked into his room and closed the door. . . .

It was almost seven thirty and I had the Foster date at eight. I had showered and shaved, and I had on my best bib and tucker. Just when it was time to get started I heard a key go into the lock

and the door opened.

Lopat and Winn came in. They closed the door and locked it.

"Conge hasn't only got the law in his vest pocket," I said, "but he has the hotels, too."

"Tsk, tsks," said Winn, coming closer. "Conge said to tell you to look up a good plastic surgeon. Because when we get through with you, nobody will recognize this guy Dobson."

"A couple of heroes," I said. "Make it some other time. I have a date."

"I guess he don't know Conge," Lopat said. "He don't understand Conge told us to fix him good. He's dumb. He don't know nothing."

"Yeah," said Winn, moving closer. "He's yellow, too. Runs to the Chief. Big guy like him with no fight in him. Spoils it. Come on, let's give it to him."

Just as he said that I let go. I caught him with a long hard right across the jaw that sent him up against the wall and down. Lopat looked surprised as he quickly slipped on his brass knuckles and started at me.

I beat him to it. I fainted with a roundhouse left and as he ducked away and moved in, I got him in the middle with my knee. He dropped to the floor and rolled over in agony. Winn was up on his feet again and away from the wall.

He came up with a sap in his hand, mouthing curses. I grabbed him and hit him again and again, holding him against the wall and letting my anger well out into my fists until I could feel his nose mash and his teeth break under the impact of my knuckles.

Lopat stopped clawing at his stomach, twisted around, and came up with a .38 Police Positive.

"Get away from him!" he gasped.

"It's a respectable hotel," I said. "Besides, Conge didn't say anything about shooting, did he?"

As he hesitated I pushed Winn at him. At the same time I lashed out with my foot and kicked the gun out of his hand. He started to get up and I saw it was no time for fancy fisticuffs. I kicked him hard in the side of the head and he dropped without a sound and fell over the limp body of Winn. I looked them over. They were both out.

I went into the bathroom, put some lotion on my bruised hands, combed my hair, straightened myself out with a swig from the bottle, and went out.

CHAPTER IV

Date with a Redhead



THE Paradise Club was on the outskirts of town. It was owned by Conge Enterprises and they said it had cost a half million to build it. It was white, with severe modern lines, and the lobby was walled-in glass brick. We went in through doors which were solid

blocks of chromium. The headwaiter looked at the smartly groomed Vallie in her tight fitting black evening gown and bowed.

"Right up front for Miss Foster," he said to the captain of waiters.

We moved through the lush surroundings and sat down near the dance floor. The waiter hurried over with a wine list and we ordered.

"You were a little late," said Vallie. "I was worried, because I didn't see you come out of Conge's office. I know there's another door, but—"

"But what?"

"Nothing," she said. "Never mind. We're here to have fun."

We had a few, and I looked around. The place was half empty.

"We're early," I said. "Hardly anybody here yet."

She took a long sip at her drink. She was starting to feel them.

"Some of them are in the gambling rooms upstairs," she said. "There are all kinds of rooms here for all kinds of things."

"Nice town," I said. "I'll bet your boss comes here often."

"You're cute," she said. "Really cute. But don't be afraid. I'm not his type. He likes them sophisticated. His current flame is a slinky brunette who sings here. He sees this Marcia Drago all the time now, but he'll soon tire of her like he does of everybody else."

"He'll probably be here soon," I said. "Now don't be afraid, Mike. He probably won't even notice you. Besides, he goes right up to the gambling rooms with Mr. Sevard."

"Sevard comes here?"

"Sure. Every Wednesday night. He comes here to gamble. That's a scream.

He's really betting against his own money."

"I don't get it."

"He put the money up for this place," she said, looking at me with half-closed eyes. "Now the boss is so strong he's getting control of the whole town."

"Sevard doesn't like that," I said.

"Course not, darling. Sevard brought Conge in to watch Wheeler when Wheeler was mayor last term. And now that they lost the election and Wheeler is back as Sevard's business manager, there's nobody to watch Conge. Sevard and Conge are like a bulldog and a tiger that have one another by the tail. Neither of them dares let go. But they just have to get along. I suppose they've got enough on each other to hang themselves. It's a scream, isn't it?"

"Yes, very funny," I said. "What time does Conge get here?"

"I told you not to worry, Mike. You won't have a bit of fun worrying like that. I know his exact routine. He leaves his house at eight forty-five, picks Marcia up at her apartment, and gets here at nine-thirty. He's always on time."

"He must live near Marcia," I said.

"No, he lives in Carlton, a small town five miles from Jefferton. He has a big estate there at Sixty-three North Carlton Drive. But he drives that big Cadillac at ninety miles an hour and makes it in no time at all."

I looked at my watch. It was nine o'clock. I got up. She looked at me unappily.

"Sometimes I talk too much," she said.

"Now we're leaving because Mr. Conge's coming."

"I'm leaving," I said. "I want you to stay right here. I'll be back in a half-hour. Have fun. And wait for me. . . ."

I whipped the Packard out of the parking lot and onto the Carlton road. The road was deserted as the car hummed along. I didn't pass anything.

I slowed down when I got into Carlton. At a corner drug store I got the directions to 63 North Carlton Drive. I went through the sleepy little town and into the highlands.

It was a big English manor-styled house with spacious grounds in a stand of Douglas firs. There was a high hedge all around that concealed a chain link fence. I cruised around slowly. The area looked unguarded. I pulled over

to the side of the road, got out and strolled along the fence. I couldn't see an alarm system. I went over the jouncing steel grillwork and dropped to the turf inside.

In the rear of the house, in what I took for the servant quarters, there were lights. The rest of the house was dark.

I cased the house carefully. There was a wing with facing French doors that extended out near the concrete driveway. I moved along the shrubbery until I got there. The doors were locked. I put on my kid gloves and opened the doors with a wire. Stepping inside, I used my pencil flash.

I WAS lucky. I was in the library.

The furniture was heavy period stuff. In a corner was a massive ornate, mahogany desk. I went over to it, rummaged through the drawers that were unlocked, but found nothing I could use.

There was one drawer that was locked and I had a little trouble getting it open. There I found something. I found a ledger with dates and names and pay-offs. I found a list of places where anything could be had for a price. I found dummy corporations and trusteeships and I had enough to send most of the Jefferton Police Department and Ralph Sevard and John Conge away for a long time.

But I didn't find what I was really looking for. I found nothing about Mason Bell or Mrs. Bell or the present mayor, Henry Luther.

I tucked the ledgers under my arm. Just then I felt something move in the dark and I snapped off the flash. I started to move quick, but I wasn't quick enough. Something came out of nowhere and hit me hard on the back of the head. I saw a bright flash of colored pinwheels, and the pinwheels began to revolve as I dived into blackness and out. . . .

First there were some little men hammering at the back of my head, then there was a red haze in front of my eyes, and my lids were so heavy I couldn't open them. I started to cough and sputter and I got the aroma of spirits of ammonia. I moved my arm to my head and it came away wet and sticky. I opened my eyes.

I was lying on the library floor near the desk. Bent over me was a well-built, well-dressed brunette. When she saw

my eyes open she got up. She put the ammonia bottle on the desk, sat down on an overstuffed chair, and crossed a pair of shapely, long legs.

"How long has he been out, Sam?" a voice said.

I looked around when I heard that, and my stomach muscles tightened. It was John Conge. He was sitting in back of me, faultlessly dressed in dinner clothes, and smoking a cigarette.

"Half hour I guess, Mr. Conge." This came from a short squat man with powerful shoulders. He stood in front of me with an ugly sap in his hand.

"I want this guy to be able to talk," Conge said. "You're careless with that sap. I've told you that lots of times."

"Honest, Mr. Conge," Sam said, "I didn't mean to hit him so hard. But he was so big looking in the dark, I thought he'd need an extra push."

"This man should never have got in here in the first place," Conge said. He got up and went over to the desk. He picked up a light riding crop and flicked it idly. "Where were you?"

"In back, making some coffee. I heard the burglar alarm buzzer and I knew someone was at the French doors. I came right out. Then I seen the flash in the library and I got up behind him and sapped him."

Conge struck out with the crop and hit him across the face, leaving a long red welt from eye to chin.

"You're a liar," Conge said flatly. "You took your time. You've been fooling around with the maid again. Where was Peters?"

Sam stood there as the welt deepened. "In the garage, Mr. Conge," he whispered, "cleaning the sedan."

"Get this man up in that chair," Conge said.

Sam put the sap on the desk and lifted me onto a chair. Conge came over and offered me a cigarette from a jeweled gold cigarette case. I took it. He held up a matching lighter.

"You get around, Dobson," he said. "You've got nerve playing things alone in a strange town. You've got nerve, but you're not very smart. I told you to get out of town today. The Jefferton police went over to the hotel to make sure. You gave them a bad time. Detective Winn is in the hospital with a broken nose and a wired jaw, and the whole Police Force is looking for you.

One of them is an old friend of yours." He turned to the girl. "Marcia, go and tell Sergeant Lopat to come in here."

I rubbed my head as she swayed her long, lithe body to the door.

"Dobson," said Conge, "I don't make threats; just statements. I want you to talk, and talk fast. I want the truth. I promise you nothing. If you don't care to say anything, Sam here, will gouge out your right eye. If that does no good he'll gouge out the other. Is that clear?"

AS I NODDED, I felt the sharp pain. "Do you believe I'll order it done?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe you would."

"Good," he said. "We understand each other. Now, Dobson, who sent you to Jefferton?"

"I came myself. Mason Bell is from my home town in Massachusetts. We were old friends."

"So you came here to find out who killed him."

"Yes."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing, except to find out now who killed his wife, too."

"Did you find out?"

"No, not yet."

"You think I'm tied in with it?"

"Are you?"

"Don't get clever on me, Dobson," said Conge. "I'm asking the questions."

"All right then," I said. "I don't know how you tie in, not yet."

"I think you're leveling, Dobson. If you did know you wouldn't come prowling around here. But you found out other things."

"I haven't got the ledgers now."

"No, they're back in the same place they were. You'll never have the chance to use any of what's in them. I'm turning you over to the police. Breaking and entering is a serious offense."

"I'll take my chances with the Carlton law."

He laughed mirthlessly. "You've got nerve, Dobson," he repeated. "I'll say that much. As long as there's a Jefferton cop here, I'll turn you over to him."

"Lopat has no jurisdiction here."

He laughed again. "You're not getting technical on me, Dobson? Not now."

The door opened and Marcia came in with Lopat and a man in a chauffeur's uniform. Lopat looked at me and the muscles in his cheek twitched.

"Come on, John," said Marcia. "I'm late for my number now."

"Shut up," Conge said. "You're working for me and don't forget it, ever. Go out and wait for me in the car."

When she left, leaving a whiff of expensive scent, he turned to Lopat.

"He's all yours, Sergeant," he said. "I know you have a pay-off to make. Take him back over the city line. Of course, if he should happen to make a break for it there, and you have to shoot—"

"It'll be a pleasure, Mr. Conge," Lopat said.

Conge turned to me. "That your Packard around the corner?"

I didn't say anything.

"Take his car, and take Sam with you," Conge said. "Get the car over the Jefferton line before you do anything. Peters will follow you in the sedan."

Lopat drove my car with me beside him. Sam sat in back with a Luger pointed at my head. I was still a little groggy. They didn't tie my hands, for they didn't want any marks to show on my wrists.

"I'm going to give it to him," said Lopat, through his swollen lips. "I'm going to grind his face with my gun butt. Then what's left of him can try and make a run for it."

"Nice cop," I said. "You must be proud of that badge you're carrying."

"Shut up!" he said as he took a hand off the wheel and backhanded me across the mouth.

We tore along the empty road. The headlights picked up a sign that said:

JEFFERTON—DRIVE SLOWLY

Lopat flashed by the white marker and jammed the car to a quick stop. As he did, I fell forward, got my hand under the dash and unhooked the .38. I pushed it under my coat and against my stomach.

Lopat looked down at my hand.

"The tough guy's feeling sick," he said. "Come on, get out. In a minute you'll be a lot sicker, chum."

I heard the Lincoln sedan pull up behind us. Peters got out and came over to my car. The wind moved the tree branches, and that was the only sound as Sam got out of the back with the Luger on me. I started to get out and as I did I slipped and fell to the ground. Lopat was half out of the door on his side.

Coming up I fired three shots at Sam.

I knew at least one of them hit in the darkness, because he stood stock-still for a moment with a look of surprise on his face. Then the Luger dropped from a shattered arm as he tried to swallow. I looked at Peters out of the corner of my eye. He stuck his hands up fast.

LOPAT fired twice over the hood of the car and missed. I was down on my stomach, snaking around to the front bumper as Lopat ducked. I looked over at Sam who was sitting in the grass looking stupidly at his dripping arm. I motioned to Peters.

"Lie down on your back," I said, "with your hands over your head."

He got down and stretched out.

"All right, Lopat," I called. "You might as well quit. Thow your gun out."

Lopat filled the air with curses. "Come on, Peters!" he yelled. "Let's rush him!"

I looked at Peters. He shook his head.

"I'm coming around the car, Lopat," I said. "Here's your chance. We'll make a hero out of you." I got up on one knee.

"Wait a minute," Lopat said.

I waited. I heard the gun clatter to the road. "Come around to me with your hands in the air," I said.

He came around the side of the car. His arms were up. I got to my feet and moved in. I ran my hands over him. I took his sap and key ring and threw them into a clump of bushes. I held on to his steel bracelets.

I pushed him around to the trunk of my car where I got the tow rope. I tied his arms behind his back.

"You're yellow," I said. "Big noise and all, it stuck out all over you. Get in the sedan. On the back seat."

CHAPTER V

Sinking Ship?



LOPAT walked back to the Lincoln and I trussed his legs up and put him on the floor. Then I went over to Peters and waved him up with the gun. I brought him over and pushed him into the front seat, cuffing his left arm to the steering wheel. I got in behind

the wheel beside him and spun the car

across the gravel shoulders and in among the trees. Then I took the key and put it in my pocket.

"I'll have somebody pick you up after a while," I said. "In the mean time, if you get bored, there's always the radio."

I went back to the road and picked up Lopat's Police Positive. In the grass was the Luger. Sam was still sitting there looking dully at his arm. I looked at it. The blood had soaked through his coat sleeve but was now drying. I led him over to the convertible and got in beside him. The two guns went into the glove compartment. My own I slid in my belt.

"I'm taking you to the Jefferton hospital," I said. "I don't think you'll talk. I don't think Conge would like it. . . ."

The Paradise Club was crowded when I got back. It was ten-thirty. Vallie was still at the table, talking to a dapper, sleek-haired man in a dinner jacket. When I came over I recognized him. It was the hotel detective from the Jefferson Plaza.

Vallie's eyes flashed from me to her companion.

"Don't go, Al," she said to him. "This big bruiser here with the dirty hands said he'd be gone only a half-hour. It's been an hour and a half."

"Complications, darling," I said. "Sorry," I turned to Al. "Good-by, Al. Thanks for keeping Vallie company."

I sat down. Al looked at me with a sneer on his face. I looked at him and half rose.

"Everybody wants to fight tonight," I said. "I'm like a red cape in a bull ring around here."

Al got up, shrugged his shoulders and left.

"What did he want?" I asked Vallie.

"I shouldn't talk to you," she said.

"Most men like my company."

"I love your company, Vallie. What did he want?"

"Information about you. That's Al Bonner. Private detective. Works for George Hartlett."

"I know him and I'm flattered at his interest. What did you tell him?"

"Nothing. I didn't tell him how interested you were in John Conge. I didn't think it was his business."

"Thank you," I said. "You're a clever girl, Vallie. When did Conge get in here?"

"About a half-hour ago. He's upstairs,

and I think Mr. Bonner just went to see him."

"Let's get out of here," I said, getting up and sliding her chair back. "There'll be a hue and cry in just about a minute. I'm as hot as a pancake on a griddle."

The barroom to which I took her was a long narrow place with sawdust on the floor, and an old mahogany bar along the middle of it. We sat in a booth in the rear.

The place was deserted except for two old bar flies who kept looking over at Vallie's well-carved legs.

"Lovely," said Vallie, putting her drink down and looking around the place. That's what I like about you, Mike. Nothing like diversified entertainment, is there?"

"Nothing like it," I agreed. "Nice and private here."

"Who's behind you, Mike? What kind of a lone hand are you playing?"

"I'll tell you. But first let me ask you something. What do you think of the government in Jefferton?"

"Every time I think of it I want to put a clothespin on my nose. All of us wanted a clean administration. All of us except Sevard and Conge and Hartlett and Al Bonner and the ones like them. We all voted for a clean administration. We didn't get it."

"No. But if you do get it, you'll lose your job with Conge."

"There are other jobs, Mike. What's more important are clean streets and decent schools for the kids and honesty and efficiency and a good municipality."

"I wanted to hear you say that," I said. "All right. I was hired by Governor Hines to run down the Bell murder. I came to him and asked him for the job. Mason Bell was an old friend of mine. I'd like to grab the killer. I'd like to grab the killer of Marian Bell, too. I think it's the same person."

"Why did the State Police go off the case?"

"The Governor and I agreed that they were too well-known and were bucking a stone wall. Besides I like to work alone. Less chance of leaks."

"And you know who the murderer is?"

"I have a pretty good-sized hunch," I said. "But I need a little help."

"I always wanted to be a Rover Boy," she said.

"It will mean sticking your neck out."

"It's my neck."

I GOT up and went over to the public phone booth. I picked the phone book off the hook and thumbed the pages until I found Hartlett's number. I stepped inside and called him. He was home.

"Hartlett," I said, "this is Dobson. I have something red-hot. Can you come downtown?"

"Immediately," he said. "How about my office? No interruptions there."

"Suits me fine."

"Give me ten minutes," he said. "Four-eleven Dexter Building. . ."

He was alone in a private office as massive as he was. He sat behind a big desk riffling through some papers. There was a locked wall safe behind him flanked by a picture of ex-Mayor Wheeler on one side and John Conge on the other. He saw me looking at them.

"It'll be a comfort to see those two in the penitentiary," he said.

"You said you wanted to tie in with me," I said.

"Yes. I want to help all I can, Dobson. You understand my position. I don't want to get caught on a sinking ship."

"All right, Hartlett. I have enough evidence to convict practically everybody of importance in Jefferton, including you. But to finish it off I need evidence of the killings. I have a strong lead on that. Vallie Foster knows something."

"That pretty redhead in Conge's office?"

"Yes. Switchboard operators can pick stuff up sometimes. This one knows how to add. I have her downstairs in my car. She's been a little reluctant, and I thought a little romancing would help."

"Of course. I see what you mean."

"Do you know of a good spot to put a girl in the mood?"

"Lookout Cliff. They sometimes call it Lover's Leap. It's on top of a high bluff overlooking the river. Ask Miss Foster. She'll know."

"Thanks. I'll take her there."

"Good. I hope you have all that evidence in a safe place."

"Right with me in the trunk of my car. When I get through with Vallie, I'd like to turn it over to you. That's a strong safe you have there."

"Perfect," he said.

"I hope you're the only one who has the combination."

"I am. I just changed it last week. I do it every so often. Can't take chances, you know."

"Fine," I said. "Will you wait here for me?"

"I'll wait," he said.

A soft breeze rustled the leaves and a cricket made rhythmic noises.

"I like it with the top down," said Vallie, looking up at the stars.

"I like it, too," I said. "Mostly because the cops are looking for a Packard convertible with a black top."

"I don't think they'll look here on Lookout Cliff," she said as she snuggled over closer to me.

I put my arms around her as she lifted her face. I bent down and kissed her warm lips.

"This is the best part of the case," I said.

She moved away from me.

"So it's part of the case," she pouted. "Your duty!"

I laughed and pulled her to me again. "This piece of it is strictly personal, Vallie. Are you cold?"

"A little."

"You'd better take off your coat."

"That's really logical. I'm asked if I'm cold. I answer yes. I'm told to remove my coat."

"You'll see why," I said. I helped her off with her coat and stepped out of the car. I went around and opened the door on her side as she came out. I took her coat and wadded it over the leather seat. Then I took her by the hand and crossed the narrow road. We sat down beside a tree.

"If my hunch is right," I whispered, "we should have a little company in a minute."

We waited. A cloud moved across the moon, partly obscuring it. Down below us, on the turn of the road, a car went by. Vallie moved close to me and I put my arm around her soft figure. Near the car I thought I heard a swish, as though a branch had snapped back. I eased away from her and crouched by the side of the road.

THERE was a scratchy sound, this time nearer the car, as though a foot scuffed on the gravel of the road. A black figure darted suddenly from the underbrush and made for the car. The moon glinted on the blade of a long stiletto as the arm moved up and then down,

plunging into the bunched-up coat on the front seat.

I leaped. I went across the road and hit him as he turned. He tried to bring the knife into play as I brought him down. I grabbed his arm and twisted, and the bone snapped like a dry twig. He screamed in anguish and brought his head back hard, hitting me on the side of the jaw and bouncing me back down on the road. His white face was a blob in the darkness as he got up. My hand went to the gun in my belt.

"Hartlett!" I called. "Come back! I've got a gun on you."

He snarled something and ran to the back of the car. I got up quickly and followed. He slipped, went down on one knee and scrambled to the edge of the cliff. When I got to him he looked at me with a face filled with hatred.

Then he turned and jumped.

I went over to the side and looked. A few small stones clattered down and then there was silence. Below me the river wound like a twisted band of silver. Vallie came over.

"He's gone," I said. "It's a long jump." She shuddered.

"What's down there?" I asked.

"An old dirt road that runs along the bank of the river."

"Can we get to it?"

"Yes," she said. "But—"

"I'm looking for something. Let's go."

I stopped for the knife, picking it up with my handkerchief. We got into the car and drove down the steep grade. At the turn of the road leading to Lookout Cliff we passed Hartlett's car. We turned left and came to the old river road. I cruised along slowly until I thought I was at the spot. I got out.

Fifty feet away I came across his body, wedged between large rocks, broken and misshapen. I went through his pockets with my small flashlight. In a compartment of his wallet I found it—a small card with numbers and figures on it. I got up and went back to the car. . . .

I made short work of the door to Hartlett's office. Once inside we put the lights on. I put the slip of paper in front of me and handled the knob on the wall safe. I heard it click and I swung it open. In a small metal box I found some pictures. I brought them over to the desk.

Vallie gasped.

They were pictures of Marian Bell. She was leering at the camera, with a hypodermic needle in her hand. She was stark naked.

"That's it," I said to Vallie. "I was looking for something like that. Hartlett was behind the whole thing, the whole rotten, dirty mess."

"It's all over my head," Vallie said.

"It was over mine, too, most of the time. This Hartlett came to me and wanted to cooperate. He talked and talked, but he said nothing. Yet I knew he was in a position to tell a lot more. He didn't. So I tried to figure things out myself."

"Hartlett was in with the Sevard-Conge-Wheeler administration. When the people pushed Wheeler out and Bell in, Hartlett knew he was through. But he was smart, so he had laid in some groundwork. Just in case. He had, somehow, made a hophead out of Marian Bell. When the election was over he took those pictures to Mason Bell. It was a beautiful piece of blackmail and Bell was stuck. If he told Hartlett to go to the devil, and if he let those pictures come out, the people would have been so disillusioned about the Better Government League that all he had fought for would have been gone. So he compromised. He yielded temporarily by putting Hartlett's stooge, Mapes, in as chief."

"Then why was Bell killed?"

"Because," I said, "Bell felt he couldn't carry on any longer. He was going to expose the whole thing no matter what it meant to him and his wife personally. Bell was that kind of a guy. I know."

"So Hartlett killed him."

"Yes. He had stooges planted all over City Hall so he knew the blowoff was coming. Hartlett was so tricky and such a master of the double doublecross that he wouldn't trust anybody else to do the job. That's why he used a knife. It takes a sadistic person to use a knife the way he did. He wanted them to suspect a maniac, and not a polished business man."

VALLIE'S forehead wrinkled, showing her distaste.

"But why Marian Bell, too?" she asked.

"Well, the first killing could be blamed on Hartlett's old buddy, Conge. He felt

safe now. So he went to the new mayor, Luther, with the pictures. He had Luther over a barrel the same way, and Luther had to play ball. Then I came along and began to pry. Hartlett was a good detective. He knew where I came from and how well I knew the Bells."

"He knew Marian Bell would talk when she came out of it. So he killed her before she had the chance. Now he thought he was in the clear. If I broke the corruption in the Fusion Party, he would show he had helped me. If not, he was still in with the old gang. He was playing the whole field. The middle and both ends. There are private detectives like that."

"Thank heaven it's all over," she said.

"Not yet. I was thinking of all those Jefferton kids you were telling me about. I'd like to make sure they get some good schools. And I've got an old score to pay off. I want to see John Conge again under different circumstances. I want to be on the giving end this time."

"Here we go again," she said, and smiled.

"Yes," I said. "You grab a cab back to the Paradise. When you get back they'll ask questions. Say you had a fight with me and that I went back to the hotel. Keep them there. Try to stall as long as you can. Will you do it?"

"I'll do it, Mike."

"I didn't want to ask you because I don't like the idea of you going back alone. So be careful, kid."

CHAPTER VI

A Peaceable Guy



WHEN I reached the State Police barracks in Torrance it was almost midnight. There was a young corporal at the night desk in a neat forest green uniform. He looked at me with sleepy eyes.

"I'm Deputy Inspector Dobson," I said, as I flipped up the leather

case. The gold-plated buzzer gleamed in the light of the desk lamp.

His eyes squinted and he blinked for a moment. He stood up.

"Yes sir," he said.

"Tell the lieutenant I want to see him,"

I said. "Now."

"Yes sir," he said.

He went into the ready room and came out with two husky troopers. They eyed me curiously as they took up positions on either side of the door.

I waited. The corporal went back to the desk. The man at the teletype machine turned and took a respectful look at me. A sleep-befogged middle-aged man came in, hastily buttoning a tunic with a silver bar on each shoulder strap.

"Lieutenant Barrett, sir," he said. "You're not on the State Police roster, Inspector. I'm sorry, but I'll have to see your papers."

"I'm tired and worn," I said. "My head hurts and I need a drink badly. But I'm not crazy, Lieutenant. I have a temporary appointment from Governor Hines." I brought the credentials out.

"They seem in order, sir," he said dubiously.

"You still think I might be a phony," I said. "Get the superintendent, Colonel Adams, on the phone, not the teletype. While you're at it you can check on me."

He gave an order to the man at the switchboard. The call went through and Barrett went over to the desk and picked up the receiver. He spoke a little then looked over at me.

"He'd like to speak to you, sir," he said.

"Hello, Colonel," I said.

"You all right, Dobson?"

"Yes," I said. "I've run down the Bell killer. It was a private eye named Hartlett. He's a suicide. Now I want to wind up the rest of it. I want your permission to move into Jefferton and take the town over with the State Police."

"Great, Dobson!" he said. Great! The Governor will be delighted with the news. As for the rest of it, can you wait until I get there? I can make it by plane in an hour."

"I can't wait," I said. "I've got a girl planted in Jefferton, and her life isn't worth a plugged nickel right now. I'm going in."

"You're sure of your ground, Dobson?"

"I'm sure."

"Go ahead then. I'll be there as soon as I can. Where will I meet you?"

"At the Paradise Club in Jefferton. One more thing. I'm putting some Jefferton cops under arrest for malfeasance, nonfeasance, and whatever else you can

think of. You can straighten out the legal technicalities with the attorney general and arrange for the John Doe warrants. Bring them with you, lots of them."

"I'll do that, Dobson," he said. "Good luck."

"Thanks," I said. "Give my regards to the Governor."

"I hung up, faced Lieutenant Barrett.

"We've got a load of work to do. How many men in this platoon?"

"Fifteen available, sir," he said. "If you need more I could call in the highway patrol. Or we can get the Kelton substation on the other side of Carlton."

"Kelton will fit in fine. Call them and have them send some men to Sixty-three North Carlton Drive in Carlton. While they're waiting for the warrants there they can padlock the place and hold everybody they find. Have them send a couple of men to Route One-o-five at the Carlton-Jefferton line. They'll find two men tied up in a Lincoln sedan in a clump of bushes. I want them brought in. You writing all that down, Corporal?"

"Yes, Inspector." The corporal grinned.

"Well, don't look so surprised, because there's more. I want a sergeant and ten men from here to take over the Jefferton Police Headquarters."

"I'm beginning to like this, sir," said Barrett. "I'm beginning to like that new Governor of ours."

"The world changes, Lieutenant. You have to have faith to stick things out. That's why I want a call in to Captain Stevens of the Jefferton Police. Have him get over to the Paradise Club right away, and have the dispatcher locate Mayor Luther. I want to talk to him."

I spoke to Luther and when I was through I went outside. The State cops were buckled, booted, and ready to go. The cruisers were brought around front and the cavalcade moved out with a motorcycle in front, clearing the way.

We made Jefferton in about twelve minutes.

WE PULLED up to the Paradise with lights off. In the darkness, Barrett spread the five troopers to cover the building. I went in alone. At the bar I saw Stevens. He put the glass down as he saw me.

"I had an idea it was like that," he

said, and his wise old face wrinkled in a grin.

"Do you know Vallie Foster?" I asked.

"Works for Conge?"

"I know her."

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

I went into the dining room. I pushed by the crowded tables. Vallie was gone. I went back to Stevens.

"How do you get to the gambling rooms?" I asked.

"Up those stairs there."

"I want to get up there without being seen. Is there a private way?"

"There is," he said. "Near the kitchen there's a door that opens from the outside which leads to the basement. But right at the stairs there's a small door. It goes upstairs to the game room."

"I'm going up there with Lieutenant Barrett," I said. "When I leave, you hang around the staircase in case Conge comes down this way. Wait five minutes, then come up."

"Good hunting," he said.

I started out to the front door. Something nudged me and I turned around. It was Al Bonner with a smirk on his sal-low face.

He had a hand in his pocket and something hard was in my side.

"Don't push," I said. "Where's Vallie?"

"She's upstairs, pally," he said. "We've been looking for you. Keep walking."

"The spider and the fly," I laughed.

I walked outside with him beside me. "Glad to oblige, Al," I said, when the door closed.

I hooked a leg behind him and pushed. As he tumbled down the marble stairs a trooper ran over and yanked him up.

"Take his gun away," I said, "and put him on ice. He's going to have company soon."

We found the door easily enough. Barret and a young trooper and I got up the stairs fast and into the game room. I noticed a hawk-faced roulette dealer press a foot buzzer. Some women started to scream and the crowd began to mill around. Barrett barked orders to them, and they began to file quietly down the stairs.

I went over to the roulette dealer.

"Where's the office?" I asked.

He didn't answer.

I took him by throat. "Where's the office?"

He pointed. I went over to the office. As I was about to go in, the door opened and Conge came out.

"I'm looking for Vallie," I said. He looked at me and his face tightened.

"She's in there," he said, jerking his head back. "You're as lucky as a cat with nine lives. You keep coming back."

"This is the last time," I said. "I've got a badge in my pocket that says Deputy Inspector, State Police. You're under arrest, and we're taking you to the Torrance barracks for fingerprinting. You can call your lawyer from there."

"I want to see some warrants," he said.

"You're not getting technical on me, Conge? The warrants will be here. Of course, if you want to make an issue out of it, I'd be only too glad to oblige."

"No," he said. "I'm not fighting you. I don't fight when the show's over."

I pushed by him and into the office. Vallie was sitting there in a white leather chair. Her face was tear-streaked and her gown was torn away, on one shoulder showed a red mark on her soft skin.

She got up and ran to me. I turned back to Conge.

"You shouldn't have done that," I said softly. "I'll take a lot, but not that."

I measured him. I let go from way back and hit him as hard as I could full across the jaw. He crashed back and bounced off the desk. His legs twitched spasmodically, and he was still.

Stevens came pounding in with an old-fashioned long-barreled pistol in his hand.

"It's all over, Clem," I said. "Pick up the garbage on the floor."

"I'm glad it is," he said, putting his gun away. "I haven't slept much lately."

"You knew Mrs. Bell was taking dope?" I said.

"I knew. I couldn't bring it out. Not when the League election meant so much to the little folks."

"It's all right now," I said. "Hartlett killed both of them. He's dead now, and that winds it up. Nobody has to know about Marian Bell. Oh, incidentally, there's a new police chief in Jefferton. I spoke to Mayor Luther before I came down here."

"I hope I can work well with him."

"No reason why you can't. His name is Clem Stevens."

HIS eyes moistened.

"Kate will be happy about that." He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose.

"You'd better get a big broom," I said. "You'll need it."

"I'll know how to use it," he said. "We've got a lot of young vets in town, and a long civil service list."

"I was going to recommend a good secretary," I said, as I put my arm around Vallie. "But after I buy her a new coat tomorrow maybe she'll go back to Center City with me. I like the way she works. I like a lot of things about her."

"Be careful what you say," she said. "I have a witness here."

Lieutenant Barrett came up. "Is that all, sir?" he asked.

"No," I said. "See if you can get me a sheet of paper. I want to have my resignation ready when Colonel Adams gets here. I'm leaving fast. I'm going back to insurance investigations. You can have my share of politics. A guy can get hurt messing around with that. For a peaceable guy like me, it's too strenuous a life."

Stevens looked at Lieutenant Barrett. They grinned at one another.

NO LUCK? - make a date with

**WILDROOT
CREAM
OIL**



THE BIG MONEY



by

ANDREW FELL

As the lights flashed on,
there was Felice in an eve-
ning gown, and Mito, with
a gun

**It was a case of Dough-Re-Murder
when ex-con George Cook forgot to remember**

TWENTY minutes ago I had seven million dollars. I had a wife, too. She decided that on her seven million dollars would look good. So now she's gone. And the money's gone with her.

That's a lot of cash for a dame to be carrying off? You don't know the half of it. She took something a lot heavier

than money when she went. She took my life with her. If she would just come back, she could keep the seven million. It took me only a month to earn it. I'll be satisfied to get my life back.

But I don't think she's going to come back.

While I try to decide what to do about

her, I'll talk. About the seven million and the month it took me to get it. Oh yes, and the murder. You don't get dough like that just for sitting around. You practically always have to throw in a murder.

I'll start with the day they evicted me from my cell up the river. Right in the middle of a housing shortage, too. The warden called me in for the customary good-bys.

"I'm glad you're leaving us, Cook," he said, giving me the firm-handshake routine. "I know you'll go far if you apply your talents constructively."

"Thanks, Warden," I said. "When I came here I didn't know from nothing. Now I can pick a lock, short-circuit a burglar alarm or drill a safe with the best of them."

He reddened, but kept on trying.

"Cook," he said, giving me the old fatherly-reproach tone of voice, "I want to help you. Now, the psychiatrist tells me you still can't remember your past prior to time you were wounded in the Army."

"I remember the shell bursting," I told him. "In Bizerte, that was. It was a ducky flash, Warden. Just scrump-tious."

He got still redder, but kept on giving it the old college try.

"Cook, you have a dishonorable discharge from the Army. You were about to be court-martialed for stealing Government property when that shell hit. But still, something might be done for you through the Veterans Administration. Treatment for your amnesia. If you'd like me to—"

I yawned, and he stopped.

"Warden," I said, "I bluffed myself out of the Army hospital in the first place because I didn't want to remember anything. Growing up in a slum, being kicked around, maybe spending time in a reform school—who wants to remember stuff like that?"

"But your family," he said, still in there trying. He must have had bulldog blood in him. "Your friends."

"They probably forgot me years ago. Maybe I ran away to get away from them. I'm looking ahead, not behind me. Now take the average guy, Warden."

"Yes?" he bit.

"He can't concentrate," I told him proudly. "He's distracted by all he re-

members—the girls he tried to make and couldn't, the jobs he tried to get and didn't, the lies he told and didn't get away with. Me, I can look straight ahead and stick to business. So good-bye, Warden, and good luck, and if you ever need a reference, just come to me."

SO half an hour later I was in the club car of the express, an hour away from the big town, enjoying my first drink in two years. The remains of the going-away five jingled in the pocket of the shoddy good-by suit they had given me.

But I felt fine. I had meant what I said to the warden. I didn't have many memories—but I had something better. A feeling. A feeling the big money was heading my way and that nothing could stop it. Sometimes you get a feeling like that, and know nothing can stop it from coming true. Like a hunch on a horse. This was like that. Only bigger. A million times bigger.

So I relaxed. I knew Fate was on the job. On my side, this time. For all I knew, she had slapped me with that shell for a purpose.

How right I was!

After a couple of minutes, I noticed the two people across from me. A plump, white-haired man ordering Bourbon old-fashionedes. And a girl. A girl to make the wolves howl as far north as Nome, Alaska. It was the mink coat that gave her away. No girl could be as blue-eyed, as rosebud-lipped, as radiant with that air of nice, wholesome woman-ness—you know what I mean—and be on the level in a mink as long, as soft and as deep as that one.

She was staring at my scar, my Bizerte souvenir. When she caught my eye she turned away at once. After a moment she whispered something to White Hair. After another moment he turned, very, very slowly, and pretended to look at the Hudson River, through the window over my right shoulder.

Then his eyes widened. He leaned forward.

"I beg your pardon." He had a voice like the pastor of a nice, rich church. "I didn't mean to stare, but I have a feeling we're acquainted. But I can't quite bring your name to mind."

"George Cook," I said helpfully.

"Cook—Cook." He tasted the word all over. "No, I'm afraid I've mistaken

you for someone else. Yes, of course—my old friend, Howard Vincent."

I had never heard of Howard Vincent. He didn't seem surprised. I hadn't expected him to be. But he invited me to join him in a drink and in another minute were all as cosy as three mice in a cheese factory.

His name was Milo Davenport. His niece's name was Felice.

Felice and I got along fine.

I told them all about the big house—homey little anecdotes like the time a four-time loser went stir-crazy and brained a guard with the heel of his shoe. They loved it. All the time I was talking, Felice and I carried on a little private conversation with our eyes. My face seemed to fascinate her. Maybe the scar made me look virile.

They got off at a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. As they left, Milo pressed a card into my hand.

"Come see us, George, my boy," he said, squeezing my biceps like an uncle. "I have many connections. I think I may be able to help you start a new career."

"When you put it like that, Milo," I told him, "how can I say no?"

Felice gave me a smile. One of those this-mustn't-be-all smiles which say things a nice girl just wouldn't put into words—only I didn't think Felice was a nice girl.

Then they were gone, and I was looking at the card.

Milo Davenport
Confidential Inquiries

And an address and telephone number. That was all.

Now why should Milo Davenport, Confidential Inquiries, pick up an ex-con on a train? You tell me. I didn't know. I only knew that Felice had been very, very interested in something about me, and the more I thought of it, the less sure I was it was my manly beauty.

So I went to see them. At two o'clock the next morning.

I had spent the evening wandering around town and lavishly spending the remains of my five. My last nickel took me uptown to Milo's address, a nice, substantial private house just out of the high-priced district.

I let myself in quietly without disturbing anybody. Why wake up such

nice people when I couldn't stay long?

Anyway, I was coming back again. Right now, I hoped maybe I could get a line on Milo's racket. If I knew what his game was, I could come back holding more cards. Besides, I might find a little cash.

So I was going through a mahogany desk in a snug little library when the lights flashed on. And the doctors said I should avoid shocks, too.

THERE behind me was Felice, in an evening gown that began at the floor and ended unexpected. Beside her was Milo, in a smoking jacket. Only he wasn't carrying a pipe. It was a gun. "Why, George, how nice of you to call so soon," Milo purred.

"I just couldn't wait till morning," I told him. "I'm the impetuous type."

"Admirable," he chuckled. "Felice, you were right. He's our man."

"Of course I was right, Uncle Milo," Felice said, with the voice of a well-bred debutante discussing a choice of dresses. "Now put away that gun or he'll think he's not welcome. I'll bring some brandy and we'll have a talk."

So Milo put away the gun, Felice brought the brandy, and we got chummy again.

"You know, George," Milo said reflectively, "Felice bet me you'd show up tonight. And you did."

"Is that good or bad?"

"Good, very good." And he chuckled again. Milo was a happy man.

"You see, George," Felice put in, and then, seeing I wasn't listening, noticed the shoulder strap that had slipped and pulled it up again without a blush, "you see, Uncle Milo has checked your entire career since we left you. Your Army record, your wound, your amnesia, the holdup that sent you to the pen, everything."

"Has a man no privacy any more?"

"It took fast working," Milo put in, "but that's my business, you see. I—ah—hunt for people who have disappeared. Particularly if they have money coming to them."

"Interesting business," I opined. "And do you ever find them?"

"Frequently," Milo chuckled. "More frequently than I have any right to expect."

"Now, Uncle Milo, no boasting!"

Felice said, "Tell George about Howard Vincent."

"What about Howard Vincent?" I let her refill my glass. "I thought he was just a gag."

"He's not a gag, George, my boy. He died six years ago and I've been hunting for him ever since."

"He's dead, but you've been hunting for him? With a Ouija board?"

"George," Milo said reproachfully, "my business is finding the missing heirs to large fortunes. Howard Vincent was the heir to a very large fortune. If I reported him dead, I'd have ceased to receive my retaining fee for keeping up the search."

"Milo," I said dreamily, "you interest me very much. I feel that we have much in common. Tell me more."

But it was Felice who did most of the talking. She had a way of getting to the point of a matter while Milo was busy chuckling.

"Howard Vincent was a typical rich man's son," she told me, in those sweet girlish tone that fascinated me. "He turned out bad. Mean. In Nineteen-forty-one he got into a really bad scrape—hit-and-run, with two dead. He was more afraid of his father than of the police, and he disappeared. Uncle Milo was hired to find him. In the fall of Nineteen-forty-one the Western Racer went off the rails in Wyoming, and Vincent's watch and wallet were found in the wreckage. It was midnight, everyone in a berth, no identification on anyone. There were three bodies unidentified. One of them was Howard Vincent. But Milo reported back that none of them could have been Howard."

"I have a reputation, a very good reputation," Milo said smugly. "So no one doubted my word. I kept on hunting for Howard, therefore, on the theory that he had escaped from the wreck and disappeared again rather than go to jail for manslaughter."

"Fingerprints?"

"Howard was never fingerprinted."

"Convenient."

"Old Terrence Vincent wanted him found, wanted him to serve his sentence, then was going to take him back into his good graces. Only Terrence died in Nineteen-forty-three. On his deathbed he forgave Howard and left him his sole heir. Seven million dollars."

Milo rolled those last three words

around on his tongue like a tea taster sampling a new oolong.

"So the estate is in the hands of Peebles, Packard and Penworthy, trustees," Felice cut it. "If Howard isn't found inside of another year, he'll be declared legally dead and the estate goes to the commonwealth."

"And Milo stops getting a retainer," I said.

"Not at all," Milo said, rubbing his plump pink hands together. "Howard Vincent has been found."

I SHOULD have got it sooner. But I hadn't. Sometimes I'm a little dumb. "He's been found twice before," Felice said. "Better likenesses than you, George. Much better. But the first one was too honest, and the second was too dumb. You're neither."

"I was doubtful about your looks, but Felice has convinced me," Milo said happily.

"He's six years older and been in the Army," she said. "That changes a man. Besides, the scar accounts for a lot of difference. And George has amnesia, Uncle Milo, genuine amnesia. If he didn't, we'd have to fake it. And you know how that would turn out."

"I know, I know," Milo said, making a face. "I tried it once, years ago. I prefer to forget the whole affair."

"You haven't," Felice said sweetly, "any objection to being Howard Vincent, have you, George? For seven million dollars?"

"Split fifty-fifty!" Milo hurried to get in.

I'd known it! That feeling had been bubbling and boiling inside me as far back as I could remember. The big money! I'd always been meant to have it, and Fate had been leading me toward it all along. That shell in Bizerte—that was all part of her plan. Suppose I had hung around and let the Army cure me?

I'd have been cured right out of seven million bucks!

Shall I tell you how we put it over?

No—you'd get bored before I finished. There wasn't anything romantic about it. No E. Phillips Oppenheim stuff. This was big business, and big business is handled scientifically, everything cut and dried.

Milo did it. He knew his business. I'll give you the outlines, the bare out-

lines. First I got a job in a garage down on the Bowery. About a week later, Milo "discovered" me. He hurried to contact Mr. Peebles, of Peebles, Packard and Penworthy. There wasn't any use contacting Packard and Penworthy. They were dead.

Mr. Peebles looked me over. Then he and Milo investigated me. They found out everything about my prison record, my Army career, my wound. They discovered I had been inducted from Sausalito, California, where I had worked in a garage. I had blown into town there, no one had known me, no one could trace me back beyond that.

So far, perfect.

Then they broke the news to me that I might—just possibly might—be Howard Vincent. I suspected a gag, a racket. I said they were crazy. That made Mr. Peebles anxious to prove I was wrong. Human nature. Anyway, lawyer nature.

Mr. Peebles was a little man with snow-white hair, wispy as dandelion seeds. But not a dope. Not quite. He hired docs—high-priced brain experts. They tapped my knees, looked into my eyes, gave me word association tests.

Amnesia. Check. Authentic goods.

Brother, was I glad I couldn't remember anything! You can't fake for dough like that!

Milo had a cute theory for Mr. Peebles' sake. I'd got out of the wreck of the Western Racer, he said, and had settled down in Sausalito under the name of Cook, and was waiting for things to blow over when the Army had up and inducted me. I'd gone along, figuring on revealing myself when the time came. Then the shell had blown away my memory.

All neat and dovetailed. Everything fitted. I looked like Howard Vincent. I could be Howard Vincent, Mr. Peebles wanted me to be Howard Vincent. Then the clincher. The old sockeroo. The one-two to the body.

Milo has an inspiration. He goes out to the Vincent place on Long Island and examines all Howard's old books. In a "History of Economics"—that was Milo's little joke—he found it! A fingerprint in ink made one night when Howard had been studying at Yale, ten years before.

So we match my finger. Check! It certainly should have checked. Milo

had sneaked that book out and we'd made the print a month before.

Mr. Peebles swore with excitement—things like "Dear me!" and "I'll be blessed!" And I was accepted as Howard Vincent.

The old charge against me was squashed, quietly. I was welcomed home, quietly. I started right away undergoing treatments, quietly. That's how money works, quietly. That's the way we wanted it—quietly!

MAYBE it sounds like I was bored. In a way, I was. It's funny. You have a feeling inside you for years something's coming your way, then when you get it, it's as if you'd always had it. No special kick.

I had a big place on Long Island. A cabin cruiser. Three cars. Servants. A private office—Vincent Shipping and Tin.

And no fear of an upset. The fingerprint had done that. Nobody looked at me cross-eyed. There wasn't any former girl friend to "feel" different, no old friends to say, "How he's changed." Howard Vincent had been a heel without any friends.

That's how I made my seven million dollars in a month.

Then for a while it was like a dream—like one of those dreams I'd waked up from in prison so often. Then it settled down and was solid fact. I had seven million dollars and no one was going to take them away from me.

Correction.

I hadn't settled yet with Milo.

He wanted his. Sure. I didn't blame him.

Only I didn't want to give it to him.

Would you have?

So I kicked it around. I slipped him a few thousand here and a few there, when I could pry them loose without Peebles noticing. I pointed out to Milo how tough it would be to turn over large sums of cash without exciting suspicion.

Milo was reasonable. He waited. He hung awfully close, but he waited. Felice hung closer. Felice draped herself around my neck. I didn't know whether she was watching me for Milo, or for herself. But she was right there.

So we had fun. A cruiser trip to Havana. Night clubs. Things I'd al-

ways wanted to do, that I'd waked up at night wanting to do. And now I was doing them and they were fun, sure, but not as much fun as they should have been.

I was too busy trying to figure how to handle Milo to enjoy them.

It had to look right, just right.

It couldn't smell, not one tiny little bit.

It took me three months. Then I had it.

When I was sure I had it, I invited Milo and Felice to my private office after hours one day, to talk about the settlement. There was no one around, and we had a chummy little discussion. We ended up by me promising Milo fifty thousand a month until his half had been paid off. I didn't care what I promised. I wasn't going to have to make good.

I knew by the way Milo's pale blue eyes gleamed that he didn't have any intention of letting me stop when he'd got his half. So I didn't feel bad about what I was going to do.

The details settled, I suggested they have dinner with me. Swell! Fine! Sure! Milo grabbed his hat. Then Felice decided to go powder her nose.

That was all—just powder her nose.

Because she had to powder her nose, I'm telling you this now.

I tried to slow things down, to hold the pot on the fire till Felice got back. But Milo had already marched across my office to the discreetly blank door of my private elevator.

"A private elevator!" he said, with appreciation. "Delightful are the privileges of wealth, George—I mean, Howard. As I hope to find out some day very soon. I'll ring for the car while we wait on Felice. Automatic, I suppose?"

"So nobody knows when I come or go, Milo," I said. "Here, have a cigar. Special from Havana. More of the privileges of wealth."

But he was already turning the knob of the safety door.

"Funny," he said. "I pushed the button but the car isn't coming. Maybe it's already at this floor."

And he opened the door.

Of course the car wasn't there. What had I spent the whole afternoon for, carefully removing a cover plate and

scrambling the wiring so it would positively look accidental? So the car wouldn't leave the ground, of course, but the door would open.

"That's odd." Milo frowned a little. "The door isn't supposed to open until the car is here. Better report this Geo—Howard."

For a long second he stood there, frowning down at that hole in the floor, that hole that reached like a black shaft of death twenty floors down. Then it came to him.

"George!" he squeaked. "No!"

HE clawed at me and grabbed my wrists. I held the door open with my foot and closed my fingers on his plump throat. He squeaked again and clawed at my hands. I shook him and the squeaking stopped. His pale blue eyes bulged out at me like a lobster's. Little bubbles floated out of his mouth. He tried to kneel me.

I gave a shove and opened my fingers. Milo staggered backward like a comedy ballet dancer, pawing the air. He seemed to waltz right across the elevator shaft, eyes bulging, mouth bubbling, hands waving, before he started to drop. Then he went like a slow motion diver, his face drifting away, below the floor level, as if he were a falling feather.

Halfway down, his voice came back to him. The elevator shaft channeled his scream and brought it up to me, adding a voice all its own to the sound. I closed the elevator door quick and hoped his fall wouldn't be heard, that he would go undiscovered until I had finished.

I needed two more minutes.

I had planned for Felice to be there. I had planned for them to go together, clinging to each other, spinning around together the whole twenty-floor drop like dancers in a dream. A horrible accident—my office dark—they had opened the door—Milo had stepped forward before he had seen the elevator wasn't there—he had grabbed Felice—I couldn't do a thing! It was horrible!

I was telling the whole story in my mind when the door opened and Felice came back in.

"All ready darling," she caroled. "Where's Uncle Milo?"

"In the elevator," I said, and hoped she wouldn't notice the sweat on my face. "We were waiting for you. You get in. I'll get my hat."

"All right Howard." We had agreed I'd be Howard at all times now. But as I stepped over to the hatrack she didn't move, just stood where she was, looking at me dreamily, like a cat at cream it isn't hungry for, but is going to eat later.

"Well, get in," I said, and tried to make it smooth. "Milo's waiting."

"Aren't you going to open the door for me, darling?" she pouted.

"Sure," I said, "sure." And I grabbed the knob. "Funny, it's stuck. Give me a hand."

"No, Howard," Felice said then, and her voice didn't alter by a tone. "I think I'll stay here. I saw what happened when Uncle Milo opened that elevator door."

"You—saw?"

"I was right outside, just coming back for my compact. I was too far away to interfere, so I watched." She could have been saying, "I was looking at the beautiful sunset." Or, "I'd like a fudge sundae."

"In that case—"

But she was too quick for me. She had the little black automatic out of her bag before I had taken a step.

I stopped. Sometimes I'm dumb, but not that dumb.

"You know, Howard," Felice said then, dreamily, "you've been very foolish. Uncle Milo has a complete account of your impersonation in his safe. In case anything happened to him, it was supposed to go to the police. Luckily I can destroy it."

"But why?" I asked, staring at her. Meaning, why destroy it? Why not let the cops have it?

"Because, darling," Felice said, ever so gently, oh ever so gently, "you're going to marry me. Then as your wife I won't be able to testify against you. In fact, as a good wife I'll have to help you cover it up. Now won't I?"

So now I have seven million dollars and a wife. A wife with blue eyes, blond curls, curves, and a baby voice that said the most startling things in the sweetest possible tones.

Sure I married her. What else could I do? I got her point of view. Milo was dead, she couldn't help that, so she might as well cash his chips for him. The easiest way was as my wife, where she could dip into the bank account any time she wanted, with no fuss and no

questions, and nobody to get suspicious. Felice was practical. Oh, you've guessed that?

So practical that she let me know she had drawn up six different complete accounts of the impersonation and my murder of Milo. All of them to be forwarded by different parties to the police if anything happened to her, even an innocent auto accident.

"That makes it a real case of 'till death do us part', doesn't it, darling?" she cooed to me after the ceremony. "Even if I die of pneumonia you'll . . . But let's not think of that. You're going to take good care of me, aren't you, sweetheart? And we will have fun, too. Because I'm not actually repulsive, am I?"

FELICE wasn't repulsive. She wasn't cold-blooded, either. What's more, she wasn't reticent. In a way, I enjoyed being married to her—when I could stop worrying long enough.

I would have been better off with Milo alive. Then I would have known where I stood. With Felice, I was in a cold sweat every time she went shopping. It's awfully easy to be bumped by a taxi in New York! And there were those documents. . . .

In a way, though, I worried worse about what went on in her mind, behind that sweet, beautifully trained baby face.

Because she fooled me. She did make a good wife. I had expected her to run up the Jolly Roger and raid the bankroll, but she didn't. She turned conservative. Nothing worse than nice, quiet night-clubbing. A few jewels—not too showy. And a penthouse apartment on Park Avenue instead of the place on Long Island—a simple little shack with nine rooms and a terrace, thirty floors up, where we could sit and watch New York's lights glitter at night like a dowager's diamonds lying in the gutter.

I couldn't figure her. But after six months had gone by, and she hadn't made a wrong move, I began to wonder. Maybe she meant it. Maybe this was what she really wanted.

Yes, sometimes I'm a little dumb.

In June, I slipped and broke my ankle. Fell on the polished parquet floor of the foyer. The perils of wealth!

That meant two weeks lying around.

Drinking and thinking. Thinking and drinking.

Felice was the perfect wife. She kept me company. She drank with me, sitting on the terrace and watching the traffic flow by underneath like armies of mechanized lightning bugs. When I was quiet, she was quiet.

The perfect wife.

Too perfect.

I might not have been suspicious if she hadn't been so perfect. Might not have noticed that each night she was urging me to drink a little more. Might not have felt the tension in her voice on the seventh night, when she had Walters, the ultra-respectable and veddy English butler she had hired, busy running back and forth with the brandies. Then she had him bring the bottle, and I knew.

I don't know what I knew. But I knew. Enough to start ditching the drinks into the ornamental shrubbery at my side of the terrace.

Because if I'd drunk all she handed me, I'd have been higher than a V-2, I acted more and more blotto. It wasn't hard. I was a long way from sober when Felice leaned over me and whispered:

"Howard!"

I stayed quiet. I could hear her hold her breath. Then:

"Howard! If you're going to fall asleep, don't you think we ought to go inside now?"

I mumbled something. She stood up and shook me, gently at first, then harder.

"Howard! Get up on your feet! I'll help you inside."

I muttered and grunted and stood up, holding onto the chair, her and everything else in reach. A beautiful picture of a rumdum hunting for his gutter.

I lurched toward the door, but she caught me neatly and eased me over, sat me on the rail of the terrace, with the street thirty dark floors beneath the seat of my pants.

I lolled there. She had a good grip on my coat.

"Good-by, Howard," she said, and still her voice didn't change. It still lilted as sweetly as the singing of a lark on a May morning.

"I'm saying good-by, Howard!" She shook me a little. "You're going to have

an accident—a tragic accident. And I'm going to be the widow of Howard Vincent, inheriting everything. I'm sorry, Howard, truly I'm sorry, that it has to be this way. I'm terribly fond of you. But you keep trying to figure how to be rid of me. And some day you'd find out. So I can't take any chances. I have to do this.

"I'll tell them you tried to stand up, and were drunk. You stumbled and your broken ankle wouldn't hold you. So you plunged over the rail. Isn't that a good story, Howard? Isn't it a lot better than the accident you arranged for Uncle Milo? And Walters will testify to it. He knows you're drunk."

Then she pushed.

She pushed, and I didn't go over. I had my good foot hooked through the openwork of the railing.

"Not this time, baby," I said, and grabbed her wrists.

Felice screamed, in sheer surprise and anger, but I hardly heard her. I was too busy. She was shoving and I was trying to push her away. I had her wrists and she braced herself, butted me with her head, got one hand loose, and clawed at my face, cursing me all the time with language that must have been bottled up inside her all her life.

Felice never liked to have her plans go wrong.

SHE braced herself and pushed and scratched and clawed like a perfumed wildcat. I realized then that I was drunker than I'd thought, and I was only trying to lean forward, to fall on the terrace, where she wouldn't be able to lift me. I heard the brandy bottle fall and break, and it sounded a long way off.

Then the brandy must have trickled toward us, wet the tiles under her feet. She slipped and fell sideways, just as she was lunging at me. Her own momentum took her up on the railing. I still held her wrist, but her weight pulled at me. I heard the wrist bone snap, and heard Felice scream again, as I let go, just in time to pull myself back.

She screamed all the way down, the whole thirty floors. Then a sound like a sandbag being dropped onto cement cut the scream short.

I swayed there, licking blood that was trickling into my mouth from the scratches she had put on my face. And then I saw Walters, standing there with

a tray in his hand, his mouth opening and closing like a feeding goldfish.

"Mr. Vincent, sir!" he got out at last. "Mr. Vincent, sir."

"She slipped," I said, and I was thinking of Felice then, not of those documents she had planted away to be turned in to the cops. "She slipped." And I was thinking of those warm soft curves and thirty floors of height and a cold dark pavement. "She slipped and fell over the rail. I couldn't hold her."

Then I saw Walters' eyes and knew something was wrong.

"Mr. Vincent, sir!" That was Walters, the perfect butler to the last. "You pushed her! I saw her struggling with you. You—you murdered her!"

So that's how my wife went, and my seven million dollars with her. Walters loped out of there like a big grey rabbit, ten minutes ago to call the cops. I'm locked in here in my den, telling this to the dictograph. Why, I don't know. Maybe to keep from thinking of what I'm going to do. Because I've come all the way up a dead end road. There's Walters to swear I killed her, and there are those documents to prove a motive.

They're outside, hammering on the door now. I have my gun out of the drawer. If I'd had both my legs, I might have run for it. But with a

broken ankle . . .

Well, anyway, Mr. Peebles, I had it. The big money! I knew I was meant for it, and I got it, and that's something most men don't do. I wonder how big a hole a .38 makes. I wonder . . .

NOTE BY WALTER J. PEEBLES

The above is an accurate transcript of my client's last words, as recorded upon a dictograph. I can only add to it that no such documents as he mentions were ever turned over to the police. They did not exist, despite what Mrs. Vincent told him. The reason is obvious.

After Davenport's discovery of the fingerprint in Howard's old textbook—a print I did not know until now was a forgery—I was inspired to hunt further through Howard's former toys. I found a bicycle which he had painted at the age of twelve, and in the paint were dozens of his authentic fingerprints, permanently preserved. These I compared with George Cook's. They matched.

Therefore—and both Davenport and his niece were aware of this all along—"Howard Cook's amnesia was not a result of his war wound. That simply complicated an injury which, it is obvious, dated back to the wreck of the Western Racer in 1941. Howard Cook was, and always had been, Howard Vincent.



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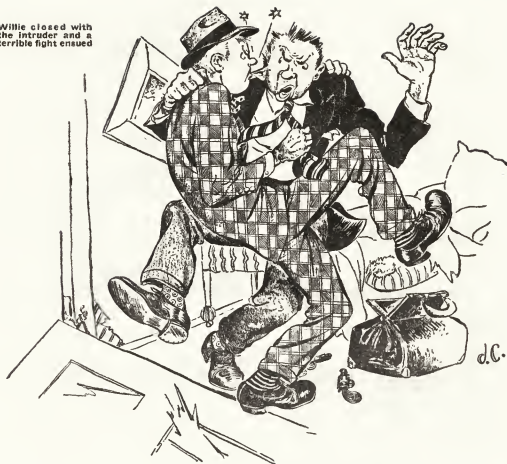
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ALL IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF

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NOW ON SALE—TWENTY-FIVE CENTS PER COPY AT ALL STANDS!

Willie closed with the intruder and a terrible fight ensued



the GAT and the MOUSE

When the Hawkeye Hawkshaw meets up with Spelvin Sump, zany inventor of "atom bullet," something's bound to explode!

AT SEVEN-FIFTEEN one morning William J. Klump saw an advertisement in a newspaper that said a room was for rent on East Fifty-First Street, and at seven-twenty-one he was ringing a doorbell at the aforementioned address. Eleven clamoring citizens were behind Willie when the landlady came to the door.

"I'll take it," Willie gasped out. "An' even furnish my own soap an' towels."

Five minutes later Willie had a roof over his head, not more than five inches from the top of his noggin. The skylight that acted in place of windows was stubborn when he yanked a chain but it finally opened and dumped two pigeon eggs onto his bed. There was also one

A Willie Klump Howler by JOE ARCHIBALD

chair in the room, a dresser with half the mirror, and a washstand that could easily have come over with John Alden and Priscilla. All of this was going to cost Willie eleven dollars every week.

"There is even black markets in bedrooms," Willie complained as he scattered his personal belongings about. "I wonder if the pigeon eggs are fresh. Ha, the old babe never told me breakfast come with the room the first day." He took a pan from his straw suitcase and filled it half full of water and put this on his portable hot plate.

The eggs were delicious. Feeling much better, the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency stowed his cooking utensils away in the closet that he was sure had not known a broom's kiss since the house was built. Willie picked some old papers off the floor and carried them to an old grocery carton that served as a waste-basket. Something fell to the floor and he stooped to pick it up. It was a snapshot of a very delectable blonde wearing a bathing suit. He turned it over and read:

To my darling—Hoping you won't stay away from me long.—Your Goldilocks.

"Huh," Willie sniffed. "Who'd go away and leave her in the first place. I will keep this and burn Gertie with it sometime."

WILLIAM KLUMP arrived at his office at ten A. M., wondering why he bothered. With Willie business was oknup which is a very expressive word spelled backwards and used by lots of citizens especially those who never studied with the Harvards. It seemed that all the dames in the city had stopped distrusting their husbands and that all characters were paying their debts on time and were being careful not to turn up missing jst to spite the private eyes.

"I must git me a sideline," Willie decided. "Maybe git the agency for a burglar alarm outfit. I'll look up some of them in the classified." Willie could not find that type of directory so he phoned the telephone company. Getting the right party he wanted to know the reason for such poor service to customers.

"This is the Hawkeye Detective Agency, isn't it?" a very haughty voice re-

plied. "Mr. Klump, we want you to understand that we are giving you prompt and efficient service. Your phone is being disconnected as of now."

"Thanks," Willie said. "I thought—wha-a-a?"

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency had no sooner hung up when the door opened. He swung around in his chair and saw a short and bulky character taking an uncertain gander at his layout.

"Sorry, wrong office," the visitor said, but Willie detained him with an impatient gesture. "I should have a suit of seven offices all done in chromo and alligator hide, huh?" he asked. "Then crooks would know how successful I was catchin' them an' business would slow down. It is a blind, of courst."

"You are Mr. Klump?"

"Who elst? Have a chair."

Willie noticed that the client had oversized ears and arms longer than most citizens. They had muscles that bulged his sleeves out and the hands at the end of each extremity were almost as big as clowns' feet. His face certainly would never cause folks to get him confused with Van Johnson.

"My proposition must be kept in the strictest confidence, Klump. I am Spelvin Sump, an inventor."

"Invent me a telephone, will you?" Willie asked. "Mine was just—er—gone, Mr. Sump."

"You have heard of the atomic bomb?"

Willie nodded. "As long as I only hear of it and not at it, I am satisfied."

"H-m-m-m," Sump sighed. "Well, I am about to perfect the atomic bullet, Klump, and I have reason to believe I have enemies who will try and steal my handiwork—or kill me."

William Klump stared at the visitor's vest to see if a strait-jacket might not be underneath. "Er, Mr. Sump, to make atoms you have a geranium mine."

"Uranium, Klump," the client corrected. "I have a friend who works at Oak Ridge and of course there are radio-activated particles left over from—"

"They are shipped to you in lead cans, huh?" Willie sniffed.

"To make a long story short I need a bodyguard, Klump," Spelvin Sump said. "But I can only pay fifteen dollars each day."

Willie's swivel-chair did one revolu-

tion before he braked it. "Fifteen dollars? Why Mr. Sump, I—that is, well, I will tell you what. I will make an inception in your case. I have four or five days before I get a report from my ops who are workin' on a big spy deal, so I'll give it a try."

"Wonderful, Mr. Klump," Sump said. "You carry a gun, of course?"

Willie shuddered. If there was anything he hated and did not understand too well, it was a heater with a trigger to it. It suddenly occurred to him that he did not look tough enough to be a bodyguard and that rough citizens would get a laugh before they ventilated Mr. Sump.

"Look, give me a day or two to think this over, pal," Willie said.

"Okay, Klump," Sump said. "I know you're a pretty busy man. But don't let me down whatever else you do."

TWENTY minutes later Willie sat and thought it over and the more he thought the more butterflies settled in his stomach. He decided to discuss the dilemma with Gertrude Mudgett when he met her for a movie date that evening.

Gertie called Willie a heel, when they met and he'd given her a quick rundown of his assets.

"I should eat my cake an' let you keep it in the ice-box at the same time?" Willie sniffed.

"Never mind the incinerations," Gertie snapped back at him. "Awright. Leave us go to a Shanty an' then we will see the pitcher at Looie's Lex. Humphries Bogard and Bacall are in it and it is called *The Gat And His Mouse*."

Willie told Gertie about Sump after taking a bite out of a liverwurst sandwich.

"Of courst, you'll do it, Willie," she said. "Fifteen bucks every day until Sump is shot or out of the woods! That ain't hay. You could make yourself look tough. Watch Bogard all durin' the pitcher tonight an' see how he does it."

Willie did. He observed the Bogie technique as closely as possible but knew he could not get away with slapping Gertie in the chops. He studied Bogie's mannerisms and the way he spoke. He sat through the picture twice and then escorted Gertrude Mudgett to the street.

"Well, baby," he said through his teeth. "You think we should lam this

burg, baby?"

"Why, Willie, you are thrillin'!" Gertie exclaimed. "Only you should pull the brim of your hat down over your eyes an' get a clean shirt and a suit pressed."

"Yeah? Who are you to tell me, baby?"

"Now wait, knucklehead," Gertie yipped. "Don't overdo it or I'll hang one on you an' put you back in character."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah!"

"If you took off ten to twelve pounds and let your hair flop over your eyes, baby," Willie said, "you could almost pass for Bacall. Come on, I'll bodyguard you home, baby."

"I have got a hunch I started something awful," Gertrude Mudgett sniffed.

On his way to his office the next morning Willie stopped in at a drug store and purchased some cotton. The clerk mentioned that it was a nice day.

"What's good about it?" Willie tossed out. "It's clammy, pal. An' leave us not git personal, see?"

"Sha-aa-addup!" Willie said, and walked out. He stood out in front for a moment lighting a cigarette the way Bogard had in the picture, and he peered at passersby from under the brim of his hat as if daring them to make something out of anything. Finally he swaggered down the street toward the building where he was behind a month in the rent, amazed at the change that he'd made in himself.

Willie, in the privacy of his office, slid rolls of cotton under his upper and lower lips and talked to a pretty doll reclining on a calendar tacked to the wall.

"Yeah, that's how it is, baby. We're through, see? Oh, yeah? So what?"

A half hour later Willie considered the Sump case and suddenly remembered his permit to pack a heater had expired. He went downtown to see an assistant D.A. he knew and soon had that little detail straightened out. The news spread through various offices and Willie had no sooner decided to hurry uptown and meet Spelvin Sump when Satchelfoot Kelly and two other cops intercepted him in the corridor. Kelly had a Roscoe in his hand.

"Look, Willie," Satchelfoot said. "This is a gun. You hold it with this end, see? An' the bullet comes out the other. Here is where you put the car-

tridges an' always remember to put them in with the bullet-parts headin' out the barrel. An'—"

"Sha-a-ddup!" Willie snapped. "You want I should blast you, huh? Look, copper, you are as funny as a brace on a sprout's knee."

"Huh?" Satchelfoot gasped. "What's some over the lemonhead? Is it them comic mags did this? An' he is goin' to carry a Roscoe!"

"Why not?" Willie yelled. "With the likes of you around there has to be somebody to protect scientrists while they make atomic—it is none of your business!"

SATCHELFOOT KELLY had to sit down after taking that one and he looked wonderingly at Willie Klump. "Where did you git the snow, Willie?" he finally asked. "An' now tell us you know where the Behr brothers stashed the hundred and thirty grand they took from the armored car over in Bayonne, ha!"

"Nobody will ever know where that is," Willie sniffed. "You cops are stumped for keeps on that one, especially after that attempted jail-break at Trenton. I'll be seein' you coppers around."

"Get him!" Kelly gulped. "A split personality, looks like. Gertie must've used a cleaver on him. I don't get it!"

"You will," Willie said curtly. "Just keep astin' for it, bigmouth!" He slid a cigarette between his lips and nearly swallowed one of the rolls of cotton. On his way uptown he mentally reviewed the Bayonne robbery and the corpses that became strewn in its wake. All of the guilty parties in the crime, that was now a year old, had got their come-uppance but over a hundred grand was still missing from circulation.

The job, the cops said, had been planned far in advance. One of the Behr boys had wheedled himself into a job with the armored car outfit. He had personally expunged a fellow-employee and had driven the C.O.D. sedan into the hinterland where he'd been met by the other Behr and two dishonest gees.

The swag jalopy had been dynamited and the contents taken. Several weeks afterward, the criminal characters had apparently put on a rhubarb over a split of the take and when the cops arrived in

the back room of the Tenth Avenue tavern Louie Behr was quite dead. Another miscreant was tottering on the ragged edge when placed in the pick-up truck of a healing hacienda and he sang the other Behr and his pal right into the Trenton pokey before he breathed his last.

Despite hours of cooking in the grill room, Waxie Behr and the other gee refused to divulge where they had stored the heavy lettuce. Waxie claimed that only Louie knew and that he was not a spirit medium. Six months after being convicted, Waxie Behr and his crony participated in a very spectacular attempt at breaking out of the Trenton klink and the last Behr absorbed half the ammo in a gun tower and was hustled to the pokey morgue. The only criminal character left of the original holdup gang was given an additional ninety-nine years, and so Willie figured he would not be interested in even a million bucks by the time he left the pen which could only be in a hearse.

One guard had been expunged during the attempted break and six had required more than a little first aid. The cops of two states had about made up their minds to forget it all, and had soothed their consciences with the thought that the crime had not paid.

"I am sure glad I never got mixed up with them tough Behrs," Willie told himself, and a passenger across the way dropped his newspaper and eyed him askance.

"Who you starin' at, punk?" Willie said, the Bogard coming out in him once more. "I'm on edge, so you look out, see?"

Willie stopped in at a cigar store two blocks from his office to call Spelvin Sump. The client was very pleased to hear his voice and was no end pleased to hear that the Hawkeye was going to protect him by the day. Mr. Sump instructed Willie to be at his home up in the Fleetwood section of the Bronx at eight o'clock the next morning. He was to be escorted downtown to pick up some tools necessary to the secret work he was engaged in.

"I'll be right on the dot, pal," Willie said. "Ah—how about a detainin' fee when I see you?"

"We will discuss that, Klump, when you get here," the client said, and quick-

ly hung up.

"H-m-m," Willie said. "Who knows I may be guardin' a citizen more famous than Pasture or Madame Curry. The future of the world could be in my hands an'—yeah, when the great secret comes out my pitcher'll be in Life. I can't wait until Satchelfoot sees it."

A series of startling events overtook William Klump the moment he rang the bell of Spelvin Sump's little abode on a shady side-street far uptown. They shouldn't have even happened to such as Willie. An angular female with her red hair full of steel clamps opened the door and glared at him.

"We got whatever you're sellin', so run along, Buster," she snapped.

"I am here to see Mr. Sump," Willie said. "He hired me to personally bodyguard him beginnin' as of now. I am to escort him downtown an'—"

"Wha-a-a? So he's like that ag'in, is he?" The irate female spat at Willie. "I should have you arrested for takin' advantage of my poor husband!"

SHE turned around fast and Willie was quite sure it was to pick something up with which to fracture his skull and so he turned and fled, a lot of the Bogard in him seeping out. He waited two blocks away to see if Spelvin Sump would appear and explain but an hour went by and no Mr. Sump. Willie Klump sadly trudged toward the Fleetwood railroad stop trying to figure it all out, but his noggin kept bumping against a dead end.

9:05 A.M. Willie Klump dropped into his chair at the Hawkeye Detective Agency feeling as much like Bogie at the moment as a smelt feels like a whale, and hoping that the niggardly Mrs. Sump's next batch of biscuits would burn to a crisp.

"Maybe I didn't git the right address an' there might be more than one Sump up there," Willie mumbled, and reached into his pocket for his memo book. Out tumbled the picture of the mouse in the swim suit and Willie picked it up and had to admire it. He was holding it more up to the light when the door behind him opened. Too late he tried to ditch the snapshot and Gertie Mudgett leaped across the room and ripped it out of his hand. She took one quick gander at it and flung it away, picked

up a dictionary and belted Willie on top of the head with same. All the words seemed to fly out of the dictionary, break up into letters and swarm around his noggin like bees. Faintly he heard Gertie's voice.

"So you didn't have the nerve to take that job, you jerk!" Gertie howled. "I come by to make sure an' here you are gloatin' over a pitcher of the doll you are two-timin' me with. I'll see a lawyer, Willie Klump, an' name her for annihilatin' of affections. Good-by!"

"Look, Gert," Willie gulped out, when the smog was out of his glimmers. "If you'd just read on the back of the pitcher, you'd—hey, Gert!"

Willie Klump leaned forward and held his noggin in his hands and lost track of time.

9:22 A.M. The door opened once more and Willie spun around and saw Spelvin Sump. The character looked both apologetic and addled.

"Awright," Willie said. "Make up your mind, huh?"

"Mr. Klump, I am so sorry," the client answered. "You see I am keepin' it from my wife I am in danger. And certain people call me—well—eccentric like all inventors. She couldn't see why I should hire a bodyguard of course. Now to show my good faith I will pay your first day's—"

Outside in the street a truck tire blew and Spelvin Sump nearly jumped out of his rompers. A strange look appeared in his eyes and he asked Willie Klump who he was and why he had been brought here.

Willie yelled at the top of his lungs when he asked what the gimmick was and Mr. Sump was quite startled again. His eyes changed back to their original expression and he laughed guiltily.

"Don't mind me, Klump. I was thinkin' of how to harness atomic fractions and was preoccupied." Sump reached down and picked up something that had nearly slid out of sight under Willie's desk. He looked at the snapshot of the blonde and scratched his inventive head. Then he stared at Willie.

"My dame just caught me with that," Willie sniffed. "She didn't give me no time to tell her I found it in my closet where I room. Some other roomer before me left it there. Well, give it here an' we'll talk business."

"I suddenly do not feel well, Klump," Spelvin Sump said in a very flaccid voice. "Some other time. Good day to you."

"An' go jump in the river, you crack-pot!" the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency yelled. "Make up your mind if you are Mr. Hyde or Dr. Jekyll!"

Willie mopped exasperating dew from his face and reached for a tabloid he'd bought and forgot to read. Staring him in the face just as if he hadn't trouble enough was a half-tone of Aloysius "Satchelfoot" Kelly. A headline screamed:

**ALERT DETECTIVE FOILS
ARMED ROBBERY!**

Inside, on page 2, was the account of Kelly's brave deed. He had been off duty and walking past a bar and grill on Seventh Avenue when two rough characters ran out of a ginmill after shooting up two customers and the barkeep. Satchelfoot had tangled with both in a spirited gun battle and had triumphed. Police believed that the arrest of the two hoods would lead to the extermination of the gang that had been terrorizing the West Side for months.

"Now he won't be fit to live with," Willie griped. "The only way he could ever nab crooks is to have them run into him with open arms like they did. Huh, they should have glued his ears back before muggin' him. He looks like a scairt door mouse."

AT TWELVE o'clock Willie went to his filing cabinet and pulled out a drawer marked L. He came up with two soggy honey buns and a jar of cold coffee and was just spreading a newspaper over his desk when Spelvin Sump came in, more agitated than three eggs in a mixing bowl.

"Look, bud, I've only got so much patients with you," Willie yelled loudly. "Leave us in on the act!"

"You must help me, Klump," the strange client pleaded. "I am in dire peril an' don't dare go home. They are trailin' me. I saw 'em an' jumped in a cab an' come here. You must put me up for the night."

"Where I sleep an extra lodger?" Wil-

lie yelled. "Even if he was a Singer midget who smoked too many cigarettes, he would over-crowd things," Willie yelled. "Look, I will call your wife an'—"

"No! No! Not that!" Sump dropped into Willie's chair and wrung his hands.

"On second thought I wouldn't do that to a dog," Willie sniffed. "Awright, but I want a detainer fee, if I am hired at last!"

"Here is ten dollars," Spelvin Sump said, and dug down for his wallet.

"It is a deal," Willie said. "Of course you will have to pay two bucks to share my room. I hope you will not judge the Hawkeye by where I live as who can't be particular nowadays, huh? I just missed a duplex apartment by fifteen minutes this A.M. Sit down an' relapse, pal, and then we'll have a rummy game until it gets dark."

"I shall never forget you, Klump," the client said.

"Er," Willie asked, "you wouldn't have atomic energy on you? I heard it soaks through."

"No, Klump, I carry four lead pencils."

"An antidope, huh?" Willie said. "That's nice to know." Then he hunted up a deck of cards.

7:45 P.M. Willie Klump and Spelvin Sump left the office building and hailed a cab. En route to Willie's rooming house a stop was made to purchase sandwiches. They entered the skylight room around eight and Spelvin Sump remarked that lifers certainly must enjoy better accommodations at the State pens.

"Yeah, but you have to commit murder to git a room," Willie said, and shooed a pigeon off the dresser. It took off and zoomed up through the skylight. "We will have to toss up to see who sleeps on the floor, huh?"

8:30 P.M. to 10:35 P.M. Sandwiches and more gin rummy. Then to bed.

Willie won the toss and he gave Sump the extra pillow and a blanket. The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency had had a trying day and he had no sooner hit the sack when Morpheus slugged him between the eyes. Willie dreamed that he was in a dentist's chair and was being given gas just as a fire alarm rang. The molar mechanic ripped

off his white coat and took off announcing that he was a volunteer fire-fighter. Willie tried to yell that the citizen had forgotten to turn off the sleep vapor. He woke up and discovered that a pillow was pressed against his face and that something heavy was on top of the pillow.

"M-m-mph—umph," Willie choked out and began to struggle. He kicked with his legs and flailed with his arms and managed to squirm out from under and fall out of bed. Something landed beside him with a loud thump and he rolled over and covered it like a blanket and banged at it with his fists. It made noises like a man and then Willie remembered he'd brought his client home with him. He jumped up and pulled a light cord and looked down at Spelvin Sump.

"Why, you dirty strangler!"

Sump got to a sitting position and felt of a mouse under his eye as he looked up at Willie.

"W-Where am I, huh? Oh, it is you, Klump. It was awful as I dreamt I was murderin' my wife."

"Yeah?" Willie asked, and shuddered. "So that was it? Well, I am sittin' up the rest of the night an' drinkin' black coffee as soon as I stew some up. You can have the bed."

"I couldn't never go back to sleep," Spelvin Sump said. "Let's play some cards until mornin', Klump."

WILLIE, before he went back to gin, draped his coat over the back of his chair and felt of the Roscoe that was in the right hand pocket. It was beginning to dawn upon him that this client of his was just a little crazy. He sat down and watched Sump deal the cards and wondered at the changing lights in the character's peepers. He had forgotten all about Humphries Bogard now and thought only of Peter Lorry. Willie could feel little things running up and down his spine and their feet were as cold as a Gromyko's good morning.

Dawn finally came and it was the first time Willie ever realized it rode on the backs of turtles.

"You could sneak out now an' save two bucks," Willie said. "Mrs. Kozowski don't git up 'fore seven. An' anybody who is chastin' you won't expect you to be abroad at this hour."

"That is a splendid idea, Klump,"

Spelvin Sump said and reached for his pants. Fifteen minutes later Willie Klump was alone and sitting on his bed trying to add things up. Crazier things could have happened to him before, he mused, but he could not remember them. He finished the last of the very black coffee and then splashed cold water over his noggin. At seven A.M. he was down in the front hall calling Gertrude Mudgett.

Gertie was no end irked when she recognized Willie's voice. "Oh, it is you, you rooey!" she snapped. "First, you got a nerve callin' me anyways and secunt this is no time to git no lady out of bed. Git it through your thick skull I am through with you, you bum! Leave us forget an'—"

"Gertie, I can explain about the pitcher of the mouse," Willie said in a hurry. "I just got to talk to you, baby. It is about somethin' that scares me. How's about tonight for dinner?"

"Mr. Klump, I am dinin' with a gen'leman frien' this evenin'," Gertie said haughtily. "He's had some nice publicity in the papers if you've noticed."

"Kelly, huh?" Willie sighed. "Well, how about after?"

"I am baby-sittin' at eight o'clock sharp, Mr. Klump. If you care to call at a certain address around nine I shall be at liberty for a few moments. Take this down."

Willie scribbled an address on the wall near the common telephone as Gertie gave it to him. He was quite downcast when he hung up the receiver.

"Satchelfoot!" he choked out. "He'll be spendin' my savin's account yet if I don't work fast. Of courst I could perpose to Gertie tonight—er—there must be a better way out."

At the appointed hour William J. Klump rang the bell outside the door of Apartment 7B in quite a genteel pueblo on East Seventy-Eighth. Miss Mudgett admitted him and she had a very precocious moppet by the hand. In her free hand she held a book.

"Good evenin'," Gertie greeted Willie coldly. "I'll give you two minutes."

"I don't like *him*!" the moppet said bluntly, then hauled off and kicked Willie in the shins.

"Cute kid, huh?" Willie sniffed. "I am glad I brought a heater with me. What you readin' to her, the story of

Jack The Ripper?"

"Nya-a-ah!" the sprout yipped, and stuck her tongue out at Willie.

"Now behave, Lucretia," Gertie cautioned. "Or I shan't read no more of Goldilocks An' the Three Bears."

"Her last name maybe is Boggia?" Willie asked, then felt something snap inside his head, "Wha-a-a-a? Goldilocks? The bears? Louie an' Waxie Behr? I found Goldilocks in the closet an'—Gert, I must be runnin' along! He wa'n't tryin' to rub out his wife. Oh, have I been dumb!"

"You're beginnin' to catch on, Willie," Gertie threw after Willie as he legged it down the hall.

Willie had a dollar and eighty cents left so he took a cab to his rooming house. He was panting like a bloodhound after a mile run in August when he burst into Mrs. Kozowski's front hall. The landlady was just hanging up the telephone when he shut the door behind him.

"What ails you, Klump?" the landlady asked. "You look scairt to death!"

"I ain't laughin', I admit," Willie gasped. "Anybody been here astin' for me? He's got long arms an' big hands, an' most likely wears a gray herrin'-bone suit. His face—"

"Why, that is odd," Mrs. Kozowski nasaed. "A man like him went upstairs about twenty minutes ago. Carried a bag an' said he was an exterminator who went to Barber's college by the day so had to work at night. I told him it wouldn't hurt none to fumigate, not that there is a single bug in the—"

"No, they all have big fam'lies," Willie yipped and started up the stairs, three steps at each jump. "An' he is not kiddin' about bein' an exterminater. Oh-h-h-h!"

ON THE first landing Willie drew his Roscoe. He met an old doll in a kimono on the second floor and she immediately went into a swoon. Up to the third floor Willie ran and then stopped dead in his tracks. Light shone brightly under his door and he heard disturbing sounds.

William J. Klump advanced along the hall and paused in front of his skylight room, peered through a crack in the door and saw Spelvin Sump kneeling beside the bed. Willie knew the citizen was

not saying his prayers, not with a jack-knife in his hand. Sump had stripped the bed and was inserting the blade of the shiv in one corner of the old lumpy mattress. A black bag was on the floor beside him and it was open.

Willie Klump stepped back, got set, then catapulted himself against the door. It shivered and cracked, held for a moment, then gave way. Willie went in pulling the trigger of his Roscoe and suddenly remembered he'd forgotten to load it when Sump jumped up and pulled a heater of his own. A bullet burned Willie's left ear and left it strumming like a plucked banjo string. Another slug made a mess of the padding at his shoulder. Then he closed with the intruder and a terrible struggle ensued.

Spelvin Sump's long arms and mighty hands wreaked havoc with Willie's anatomy and physiognomy for the first few moments. In a clinch Willie clamped his teeth on Sump's right ear and got hold of the erstwhile client's necktie and pulled with all his might. The intruder gasped for air and turned Willie loose and his knee hit Willie in the meridian and let all his air out. Willie, painfully waiting for his flat to be repaired, heard the clamoring of Mrs. Kozowski's other guests. Somewhere there was the screech of a cop's whistle.

Sump barricaded the door with all the furniture in the room, then went to work on the mattress. He slit it open and some familiar green stuff spilled out with the other stuffing. Sump feverishly grabbed it up and tossed it into his bag.

"You got no chance," Willie yelled when his bellows responded, and wondered what his hand was pressing against. He looked down and discovered it was his Roscoe. He came up with it and threw it and it bounced off the side of Sump's head. The mysterious intruder blinked, swung his eyes toward Willie.

"It ain't possible," Willie gasped. "Nobody has a noggin that hard: Well, I tried to puncture it."

Sump's eyes looked very strange to Willie. The things the intruder started babbling pulled Willie's lower jaw down.

"Did they break out, huh? Waxie an' Louie? How did you git that suit of civvies, pal? Say, this don't look like the cell where—I guess Waxie hit me

harder than I—" He looked down at the shiv he held and quickly dropped it. "It was a billy club I was holdin' when—for the love Mike, say somethin'!"

"Dr. Jeckle again, huh?" Willie forced out. "Who are you anyways?"

"Dinsmore Ilch, a guard here at the pen," the intruder said, and then fell forward on his face.

Willie was unsteady on his pins when the cops broke in and surveyed the shambles.

"Goldilocks," he mumbled. "She knew just two Behrs. The payroll from the armored jalopy stuffed in the mattress. Yeah, Waxie Behr had this room oncet an—he knew the clams would be safe in this mattress as it wouldn't be changed oncet in twenty years, but—"

"I had a suspicion he was a little crazy," Mrs. Kozowski told the cops.

"I wisht you'd told me," Willie yelped, spinning around to face her.

"I wa'n't talkin' about the poor man on the floor," the landlady sniffed. "It is no wonder all my tenants the last few months who had this room complained about the lumps in the mattress. How much did you say was in there?"

"Over a hundred grand," Willie said.

Mrs. Kuzowski gasped for air and then fainted.

"Let us start at the beginnin'," a big cop said. "Who was it you was fightin' with over the swag, you punk!"

"Just a moment!" Willie said indignantly. "Take a look at my badge! I am Private Eye William J. Klump."

"Mike," another member of the force said, "It is him, no kiddin'. In a setup like this who elst could it be?"

"Never mind the flattery," Willie said sharply. "Shall we pack up the dough and take it and the criminal character to the nearest Bastille or do I have to also do that solo? I can't wait until I find out how all this happened."

AN HOUR later Dinsmore Ilch, after sampling certain restoratives, related a story that no reputable radio station would buy. Willie Klump had called up Satchelfoot Kelly immediately upon his arrival at the precinct station, and now Willie's pet aversion was sitting here open-mouthed, and braiding the two sections of his necktie.

"Sure, I was a guard at the Trenton stir," Ilch said. "I got to know Waxie

Behr. Once he showed me a picture of the blonde exactly like the one I picked up in Klump's office. Well, Waxie and four other cons figured out a jail-break, but they had to have a guard in with 'em to be half-sure it would work. Waxie started feelin' me out day by day an' finally he said if the break worked an' he got out where he'd planted the armored car scratch, he'd see I got fifty G's. I said for him to count me in. I was to be at a certain spot with a key that would get them out of the cell-block. Waxie was to tap me on the noggin just to make it look good for me."

"I get it," Willie cut in. "They crossed you up an' Waxie tried to tap you for keeps."

"Shut up, Klump!" the D.A. snapped.

"Yeah, you're right, Klump," Ilch went on. "I never was myself very often afterwards. I lost my job, of course. I remember somethin' about tellin' the Mrs. I was makin' atomic bullets out of uranium I said was in the rocks in the backyard. My brain kept gettin' mixed up. That picture of Waxie's moll I saw in Klump's office knocked me almos' sane for a couple of days. He told me where he'd found the picture and right away I guessed where Waxie or Louie must have stored the dough, so I worked it so's Klump would take me to that room of his where I tried to knock him off. It was awful—there was days an' weeks I don't even remember. Waxie hit me with a piece of lead-pipe, an' it sure scrambled me up."

"I understand, Ilch." One of the men listening nodded his scholarly noggin. "I am a psychiatrist. At times you were acting under a subconscious, plunged deep into your neurogliosis, and other times—"

"You mean he was just plain wacky!" Willie said.

"When I first began to act queer, my wife took me out of where we lived in Jersey an' moved up where we are now," Ilch continued. "She figured I could change my name and it would be good for me psychological. Don't tell her I was in with Waxie on the break, as maybe durin' a subconscious I never told her."

"I have a slight headache myself," the D.A. sighed. "Klump, you said you caught on when you went to see your girl who was baby-sitting and readin'

about Goldilocks an' the bears. Let us think up some other solution for the newspapers, shall we? I realize the public believes everything they hear at political conventions, but after all there's a limit to what they—ha, you understand, Klump?"

"I do not intend to hold none of the true facts from the citizens who pay salaries for the likes of cops," Willie said indignantly, and felt the Bogie influence once more. "You coppers want to hog the credit, maybe. You think I was born yesterday?"

"Was you born?" Satchelfoot Kelly asked sourly.

"You wa'n't you dope," Willie sniffed. "They found you under the leaf of a opium plant."

"Lock me up," Ilch begged. "If I listen to Klump anymore I will go stark and ravin' mad again."

Satchelfoot Kelly arose and placed his slouch hat on top of his head on the bias and asked to be excused.

He stumbled toward an open window and a cop yelled, "Hey, that ain't the door!"

"Who ast you?" Satchelfoot flung back. "If I survive the drop I am goin' to look for that Snowy White and the seven dwarfs. I think they're runnin' a narcotics ring."

The D.A. and three cops finally forced Kelly into a chair.

Willie said petulantly, "I don't see what ails everybody. You'd think it was the first time I ever solved a case."

"That is what puzzles us, Klump," the D.A. said pawing at his face. "As a detective you look absolutely insolvent."

"Just what I've been tellin' all my clients," Willie said, and yanked down the brim of his hat. "Well, so long coppers. I must call up Baby."

Willie did after posing for some pictures.

"Oh, that will mean an awful big fee, you darlin'!" Gertie said gleefully.

"I hope you remember that ignorance of the law ain't no excuse," Willie said. "Fee-splittin' is a criminal's offense. Sorry, baby. Be seein' you around." He hung up quick, yanked at the brim of his hat. "Yeah, baby—yeah!" he said as he walked away. "So what?"



The baffling murder of an artist's model smashes a blackmail and smuggling conspiracy wide open when Lieutenant Burt Oliver tackles a
poser of a mystery

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a bell for NOLA

The amazing true story of an American officer who found himself military mayor of a turbulent town!



JACKSON HITE

THE gray-haired, competent-looking American officer walked briskly into the office of the military commissioner in Nola, in the boot of Italy, and introduced himself.

"I'm Lieutenant-Colonel Harry G. Hershenson of the American Military Government," he announced. "I've been told I'm to take over."

A wide grin of relief smoothed out the harried features of the British colonel behind the desk. He jumped up from his chair, pumped the hand of the American with delight.

"Man, but I'm certainly glad to see you. Another day of this"—his arm went out to take in Nola and all of Italy in a comprehensive gesture—"and I'd

resign, quit, get out of the Army for good."

Hershenson took a seat, lit a cigarette. "Why, what's wrong with Nola, Colonel?" he asked.

"Wrong?" The weather-beaten officer, whose tunic was covered with campaign ribbons and medals for gallantry in action, gave a most un-English gasp.

"Everything's wrong!" He began to pace nervously about the room. "If ever there was a perdition-hole, this is it! You know how notorious Naples is for its crime and corruption?"

"I've heard something about it."

"Well, Naples has nothing on Nola. There's a saying around these parts, 'The best Nolano is worse than the worst Napolitano.' That'll give you a rough idea of what you're up against in trying to run this town, not to speak of its twenty-three surrounding communes. There are four hundred thousand people living here, and as far as I can make out every one's a thief, a gangster, a black marketeer, a—a—" He had to stop for breath.

Hershenson crossed his legs, smiled. "You forget,"—he smiled quietly—"I used to be a Chicago lawyer."

The British colonel set his kepi firmly on his head. "It's all yours, Colonel Hershenson, and I sure wish you luck! I'm glad to be rid of it."

He was almost at the door when Hershenson called out: "By the way, how large is my staff?"

The British officer paused at the door. A peculiar grin creased his saddle-leather countenance.

"Staff?" he echoed. "One American sergeant and two British MPs. Good day, sir." Then he was gone.

Military Mayor

And so Lieutenant Colonel Hershenson, formerly a prominent Chicago lawyer and chairman of the Grievance Committee of the Bar Association, found himself military mayor of the most turbulent spot in Italy. It was just after our Forces had landed at Salerno, and the war was raging up and down the whole peninsula. Even Hershenson, after sur-

vewing the situation, admitted that maybe the Britisher was right, that he had bitten off much more than he could chew.

Nola had been bombed, overrun by Italian soldiers, then by arrogant Nazis, and now it was the turn of a combined British and American force. It was filthy, crowded, starving, diseased and a roaring sink of every vice and iniquity. Armed robberies were openly committed in broad daylight on the main thoroughfares. Murder and vendetta stalked the side streets. Larceny on a grand scale seemed the chief occupation.

Everything that wasn't tightly nailed down disappeared overnight—food, clothing, supplies, furniture, automobiles, even lumbering Army tanks had a habit of vanishing into thin air. As for the black market, conditions were unspeakable.

Tough Eggs Wanted

Hershenson called in his small staff. The three soldiers looked glum, discouraged.

"There's nothing we can do, sir," the American sergeant grumbled. "You'd need a whole army division even to begin to clean up this mess. We've put barbed wire around our own supply depots, but that don't stop 'em. Mebbe if we could shoot a few guys as an example, it might help."

The colonel shook his head. "Army regulations don't permit it. Well, we'll have to see what we can do."

But Headquarters men threw up their hands when he asked for more men. "Sorry, Colonel, there's a war on. We need every man we've got for the Front. Those blasted Nazis are making us fight every inch of the way up the peninsula."

"This business of being a mayor isn't what it's cracked up to be," thought Hershenson wryly. But, being a lawyer, he refused to give up easily.

First he had a powwow with his sergeant, Bill Segal. "I hear you can jabber Italian like a native, Sergeant," he suggested.

Segal grinned. "Better, sir. That's why they put me on this detail."

"Fine. First off, rustle me some good

quarters. Second, get hold of some guy that can speak English a bit and who belongs to the underworld here—and I mean underworld."

The sergeant looked doubtful. "The first is easy, Colonel. But I dunno about the second. However, they can't kill me more'n once for trying!"

Bill Segal knew his Nola, all right. Within two days he had lined up a hundred-room palace that a bird named Ralph Mercogliana had bought with a wad of dough he had made back in the good old USA in the contracting game. Hershenson rattled around the old palace like a pea in a trunk, but at least he had room to turn in.

But it took a week to lay hands on a tough egg that lived up to the second specification. Finally, Segal came along, dragging in by a collar an hombre who sure looked the description, and then some.

A First-class Liar

"I got just the guy you want, Colonel," declared Bill triumphantly. He gave his prize an extra shake. "Stand up straight when you're in the presence of an officer, you."

"Hm!" grunted Hershenson, giving him the once-over.

Thin, rat-faced, shifty-eyed, hair greased back and shiny, dressed in an expensive, loud-checked, high-waisted suit. "If I met this bird in the Chicago loop district, I'd spot him for a member of the old Capone gang," he thought. Aloud he said, "Do you speak English?"

The ratface split into a grin. "Me speak English? Say, buddy, are youse kiddin'?"

Hershenson surveyed him thoughtfully. "My mistake, pal. I set you down for a Chicago gangster, but you're Brooklyn—pure Brooklyn. What mob did you belong to?"

The man swaggered a bit. "Lucky Luciano's, buddy. An' ya got me dead ta rights. Born an' raised in Brooklyn."

Sergeant Segal looked scandalized. he poked a blunt thumb in the mobster's side.

"Say 'sir' to the Colonel, guy, or I'll

put you in the cooler."

"Ya can't scare me, soldier. Me an' the clink's old friends."

"Let's not worry about formalities, Sergeant," declared Hershenson. He leaned forward. "What's your name?"

"Genovese—Vito Genovese. Ever heard o' me back in th' USA?"

"No. Your fame didn't reach Chicago. Why did you quit New York for Italy? Are the police after you?"

Genovese looked insulted. "Naw! De cops ain't got a t'ing on me. I jus' gotta yen tuh see me old folks again."

"He's a first-class liar, Colonel," Segal interposed. "He came here because the pickings are good. He's mixed up in every racket in Nola. We oughta put him before a firing squad."

"Sorry, Sergeant. I've got other uses for him." Hershenson put on his severest air. "Look here, Vito. There's no doubt in my mind we can get enough on you to put you away on ice for a long time. But if you're willing to play ball, I'll see to it you're not touched."

"Whatcha want me t' do?"

"I need your help. Nola's a pretty bad mess. We've got to clean it up. But we need the right dope, and you're the man to deliver it. What do you say?"

The mobster swelled out his narrow chest. "Sure t'ing. After all, us Americans gotta stick together. You kin count on me."

"Fine. But remember—no funny business. And go easy on your own racket. I'm not asking what it is, mind you, but I draw the line pretty hard."

"Aw, gee, I ain't—"

"Stow the gab," ordered Segal authoritatively. "Can't you see the Colonel's busy?"

"Ya Got Someth'ing Dere, Sarge!"

Genovese proved a tower of strength to Colonel Hershenson. Once he had determined that the Colonel meant business and was a square-shooter to boot, he became his most enthusiastic assistant.

"I'm no stoolie, see," he told Segal, "but the Colonel's got th' right idee. Dis here place smells out loud, and us Amer-

icans gotta see dat dese here foreigners don't put nuthin' over on us."

Bill Segal looked him over with contempt. "Foreigners?" he exclaimed. "You were one of them yourself, weren't you? And while both the Colonel and myself were born in the U. S., our folks were European Jews. Get this straight, Vito. People are people *everywhere*, as long as they're decent."

The ex-gangster looked abashed. "Aw, mebbe ya got somet'ing dere, sarge," he mumbled.

Nola at first resented the attempt to clean it up. The racketeers were doing too well to have their flourishing trade interfered with by an American officer and a detachment of three men. Threats were openly voiced, and mobs of hoodlums demonstrated. But Hershenson merely strapped on a Colt .45 conspicuously and stalked the streets of the swarming, hostile town with an indifferent air.

Within two weeks Nola knew that it had met its master. A stock of grenades would disappear from a British ammunition dump in spite of barbed wire, guards and high-powered searchlights. Hershenson would buzz Genovese and the Brooklyn mobster would go underground for a night. In the morning he would return to Headquarters, grinning.

Hershenson would buckle on his Colt, and the pair, with Bill Segal along, would swoop down upon a dilapidated tenement near the waterfront, swarming with hard-faced characters. The characters outnumbered the Americans ten to one, but Hershenson's steely voice, Segal's carelessly held revolver, and Genovese's smirk awed them into nonresistance.

The crack of a gun and the scream of a victim in the remotest section of the town was somehow followed by the magical appearance of the American colonel and his ever-present bodyguard. It got so that the underworld came devoutly to believe that the *Americano* had eyes in the back of his head, and a sense of divination whereby he could smell out larceny, murder, and sudden death before they even took place.

The skimpy jails were soon filled to

bursting, and Hershenson sat as judge dispensing justice. He was fair, but tough. Crooks, thugs, black marketeers who waxed fat on the misery of the people, spies and unrepentant Fascists, met with short shrift.

Twice a week court was held, and fifty to seventy cases a day went through his hands.

Loud wails of anguish rose at the immediacy of his judgments and the severity of the sentences. Nola wasn't accustomed to such speedy justice. Black marketeers, especially, sought the intervention of high officials and influential persons to protect them. Hershenson disregarded the most persuasive interventions. In one case he announced from the bench to a crowded courtroom:

"I have heard all the evidence in this case and I am convinced that the defendant is guilty as charged. Ordinarily I would have sentenced him to three months at hard labor. But, since both the mayor and the bishop have taken such a personal interest in this case, I am sentencing him to six months at hard labor. In the future, I shall give double and, if necessary, triple sentences to all defendants who invoke the aid of influential friends in their behalf. The court is dismissed."

Bigger and Better Crooks

After eleven weeks, Nola was clean as a hound's tooth. Its streets were clean, food prices had gone down to within the reach of the poor, and a woman could walk safely through the toughest neighborhood in town. The high command thought it time for this hard-bitten colonel to do a similar job in Naples. Here there were only 1,200,000 Italian civilians and 700,000 Allied troops to worry about. And a stench that rose to high heaven.

Hershenson moved in with Sergeant Segal and mobster Vito Genovese, and went to work. But he had not only Naples' normal complement of crooks and knife and gun-toters to worry about. There was also skulduggery in high places. Ranking officers thought they were entitled to special favors and other-

wise tried to impede the proper workings of the military government.

There was the general, for example, who asked Hershenson to lend him a Naples fireboat for a week-end fishing trip off Capri. There was the colonel who sent his Italian friend, the marquis, with a note requesting Hershenson to "fix him up" with a permit to operate his automobile and get Army gasoline. Hershenson slapped both of them down.

It was a tough assignment. Vesuvius went into eruption and flooded the surrounding districts with red-hot lava. A typhus epidemic raged. The Nazis came over regularly and dropped bombs. Requests for steam shovels and bulldozers to clear away the wreckage after raids that were sent through the regular channels were disregarded. And the dead had to be buried. Flour to feed the hungry was stolen.

After a few futile attempts to break through Army red tape, Hershenson conveniently forgot about regulations. He "borrowed" equipment wherever he found it, and commandeered men from off the streets. Result—Naples began to dig out and look more and more like an average American town. Protests came in from "regular" channels over his unorthodox methods. But the commanding general merely winked.

"Officially," he told Hershenson solemnly, "I must ask you not to break any more regulations. Unofficially, I want you to keep it up. It's the only way to get things done."

When at last the Italian government took over administration in Naples, it was presented with a clean city and an orderly one, thanks to the Herculean efforts of an American named Harry G. Hershenson.

Straight-Shooting Rewarded

It was in Naples, though, that Hershenson "lost" Vito Genovese. A message came through from Headquarters. The Colonel stared at it, then called the mobster before him.

"I'm sorry to have to do this, Vito," he said gravely, "but you're wanted in New York. You were indicted for a night

club murder back in Thirty-seven, and they've caught up with you at last. Now tell me the truth."

For a moment Genovese sagged. Then he leaned forward earnestly.

"Colonel," he said, "I admit I ain't no angel. Dere ain't no wings sproutin' from my back. I've been in all the rack-ets—whisky, beer, poultry. But I ain't no killer. I never bumped nobody off, an' dat's da trut', so help me."

Hershenson studied him a moment. "I believe you, Vito," he said finally. "I'll have to ship you back, because there's a formal warrant here. But I'll do the best I can for you. You've been straight-shooting with me, and I'm going to help you. In the meantime—good luck!" And he shook hands with the Brooklyn gangster.

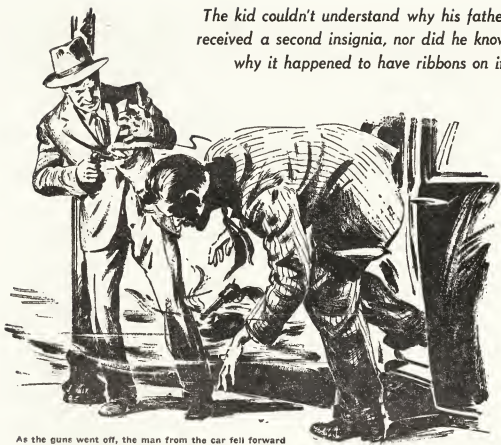
Genovese never went to trial. After further investigation back in New York the indictment was quietly dropped. From last account, the former mobster has turned straight and is doing all right.

Hershenson went to Milan next, recently released from German occupation, and teeming with Italian partisans out for revenge for all they had suffered from Fascist collaborators. After the first few days of "kangaroo courts" and summary shootings, Hershenson clamped down. The jails, crowded with cowering prisoners, were placed under strong guard, and regular courts for the trial of suspects were set up. In a surprisingly short time the partisans were disarmed, and regular justice took the place of private revenge. . . .

Lieutenant Colonel Harry G. Hershenson is back in Chicago now, a civilian. But even though his military days are over, and the demands of a family and a law practise keep him busy, he has not forgotten the days when he ran three great Italian cities, nor the Army buddies now facing problems at home.

As an active member of the American Legion and a State Commander of the Jewish War Veterans in Illinois he is working on home conditions with the same energy and forthrightness that he displayed abroad.

The kid couldn't understand why his father received a second insignia, nor did he know why it happened to have ribbons on it!



As the gun went off, the man from the car fell forward

THE SECOND BADGE

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

MY FATHER wanted his gun. He's been after mother to give it to him for days—ever since he came home more than three weeks ago so badly hurt that he had to stay in bed. I wondered why a man who was sick wanted a gun.

But mother said he'd get the gun over her dead body, and I thought that was funny because the gun was easy to find. She'd hidden it in the cellar on a rafter where she used to keep a little extra money sometimes.

"Joey," mother said to me, "don't you

ever let your father know where the gun is. Do you understand?"

I said I did, but I guess maybe I didn't because later on I gave father the gun. I told him where it was hidden. But that was much later. Maybe three days.

The afternoon before it happened, I saw mother peeking out of the window the way she always did when Mrs. Connor had a new hat or some new neighbors were moving in and mother wanted to see what they had in the way of furniture.

That afternoon I heard her give a lit-

tle sob, something like I do when things don't go quite right. She came away from the window and hustled me into my room. Then she did a strange thing. She hurried to father's room and helped him get out of bed. I saw it all because I peeked, too.

Father couldn't walk very fast and he had to lean on mother. I saw how his shoulder and side were all bandaged, and that was the first time I knew he was hurt and not plain sick. Mother took him down to the cellar. I thought she was going to show him where the gun was hidden.

But I was wrong, because father said, "Madge, where in heaven's name did you put the gun? Do you want them to take me without a fight?"

"They won't take you," mother said. "And there won't be any fight."

She came up from the cellar all alone, rubbing her hands against her apron. They were pretty dirty and I knew she'd opened the door of the old vegetable cellar, because my hands always got dirty when I did that too.

I thought it was funny that the two men didn't knock. They just walked in and mother came out of the kitchen with flour on her hands, just as if she'd been baking. They were very big men. They looked mean.

One of them said, "Where is he, Mrs. Crenshaw? He was wounded and he wasn't taken to any hospital. Where is he?"

Mother dabbed the side of her hand at her eyes. "They didn't tell me. I haven't seen him. He isn't here. I tell you."

The biggest of the two men told the other one to watch mother and he went around looking in all the rooms. He scared me so much that I slid under the bed and held my breath while he came into the room. I could see his feet. They had big, square-toed shoes. He went away after awhile, but I didn't come out from under the bed until mother called me.

[Turn page]

When PRAYER FAILS

The prayers of the most worthy people often fail. Why? The unworthy often have the greatest health, success, riches and happiness. The best, smartest, and most industrious people often have only pain, poverty and sorrow. Why? Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman found the answers to these questions. His eyes were opened by the strangest mystic he met during his twenty-one years of travels in the Far East. Sick then, he regained health. Poor then, he acquired wealth and worldwide professional honors. He wants to tell the whole world what he learned, and offers to send a 9,000-word treatise, FREE, to everyone who asks promptly. It is a first step to the POWER that KNOWLEDGE gives. There is no obligation. Write for YOUR FREE COPY today.

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She was crying. Her eyes were all red. She told me I'd been a good boy to hide and I wondered about that, because when a boy hides it shows he's afraid and mother always used to tell me not to be afraid.

Pretty soon she came up from the cellar and father was leaning on her even harder. His face was very white and angry-looking. Mother put him back to bed. I noticed then that all the curtains in the house had been pulled all the way down.

Mother went to the living room and I could hear her telephoning, but I didn't know what she said because I was so worried about father. He just lay there, looking up at the ceiling and saying nothing.

SOON father went to sleep and mother seemed to be happy about that. Every once in awhile she'd tiptoe to the window, pull the shade away an inch and peek out. Once I followed her and she didn't know it and I was able to peek out too.

Right across the street, in the doorway of the candy store, I saw a man standing and there was enough light so that I could see his badge and brass buttons shine.

"Why is the policeman there, Mother?" I asked.

"Hush, Joey," she said. "Don't ask questions. And you're not to tell your father there is a policeman across the street. Is that clear?"

I nodded my head. I knew I mustn't tell father, but I didn't know why. But when mother wasn't looking, I'd peek out of the window again and the policeman was always there. She caught me the last time I did it and she made me go to bed.

Father woke up when the telephone rang. I heard mother answer it and then go to father's room. Mother said, "Mike, it's my sister Kathleen. She's been taken sick and I've got to go over. That is, I should go over, but I won't. I won't leave you for a second, Mike!"

Father growled like a bear. He said.

"Madge, for heaven's sake, I can take care of myself. Go to Kathleen. She'll need you, what with her brood of four and that weak-kneed husband of hers. Go on! I'll be all right."

"But they might come back—" mother said.

"Why? They searched the place today, didn't they? Maybe they'll plant somebody outside to watch and see if I do come home, but they won't enter the house again."

I wondered why mother didn't tell him there was a policeman watching the house all the time. She didn't though, and after a lot more talking she finally agreed to go to Aunt Kathleen's house.

After she was gone, I tried to sleep but I wasn't tired. So I got up and then I heard somebody moving softly toward my room. I was getting ready to hide under the bed again when the door opened and it was father. He came over and sat on my bed.

"Joey," he said, "do you have a lot of faith in your old man?"

I wasn't sure what he meant, but I said I did. He said, "Joey, your mother hid my gun. I think you know where it is. I want the gun, Joey. I want it right now before your mother comes back."

I didn't say anything because I'd promised my mother not to tell. Father looked at me for a long minute and then put a hand on my shoulder.

"Joey," he said, "I know mother probably made you promise not to tell because she doesn't want me to have it. But I must. Joey, if I don't get that gun in my hands, you may never see me again!"

"Will you go away?" I asked him.

"They'll probably take me away—if they don't finish the job right here. I can't waste time. They'll begin watching the house at any minute."

I had promised not to tell about the policeman outside, but I thought father ought to know. "There's a policeman in Mr. Billing's candy store across the street."

Father said, "Blazes!" and a lot of

other words under his breath. He got up as if he wasn't sick at all, but he stumbled once and almost fell. I felt awfully sorry for father. He was always big and strong and never afraid. But he was afraid now. Just like I'd been when those big men came this afternoon and I hid under the bed.

Father went to the window and peeked out just like mother did. He said some more of those words under his breath and turned to me. He shook me a little.

"Joey, the gun. I've got to have that gun! If you made a promise, you can take it back because if I don't have the gun, neither you nor your mother will ever see me again."

I didn't like that because father was always a lot of fun. I guessed maybe he wanted to sell the gun and pay some of the bills mother was always talking about. I knew if father said I could

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break the promise, it was all right. So I took him down cellar and showed him where the gun was.

He took it down off the rafter and broke it open. He let the bullets fall into his hand and then he got a rag and some oil and cleaned the gun. He worked awful fast, and when he was putting the bullets back in two of them fell out of his hands. He was shaking and looked awful scared, but somehow I didn't think he really was.

FATHER carried the gun upstairs and put on his clothes. He slipped the gun into his side coat pocket and patted it like he wanted to be sure it was there.

Then he said, "Joey, I've got to go out. Stay here, and when mother comes back tell her it wasn't your fault. Tell her I can't lie in bed waiting for them to come. Like I was nothing but a clay pigeon."

I didn't know what he meant by saying he was like a clay pigeon. I'd never heard of a pigeon being made of clay.

Father took me in his arms, like the time he was going away last year. He kissed me and I thought that was funny, because father said us men shouldn't ought to kiss one another. That was for women.

He said, "If that policeman comes, don't tell him anything. Not one thing, Joey!"

I said I wouldn't. Father went out by the back door. I watched from the kitchen window and I saw him fall once. He got up and he looked awful sick

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again, but he kept going. I thought that mother wouldn't like it if I let father go out alone this way. He might fall down again.

So I put on my football helmet instead of a hat, and then I went out the back door too.

When I reached the back street, father wasn't in sight. Then he came out of a doorway and moved down the street. Every now and then he ducked into another doorway and he always kept his hand in the pocket where I'd seen him put his gun.

He didn't fall any more, but he stopped to rest in those dark doorways. Then he went into a place where they sell whisky and I couldn't follow him there, but through the window I saw him stand at the bar and take a drink. He kept looking around and always had his hand in his pocket where the gun was.

He went to another place where they sold liquor, but he didn't see me. I followed him and looked in again. This time he took the drink and poured it on the floor when nobody watched him. I thought that was funny, but I don't

[Turn page]



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understand things grownups do all the time.

Father was getting sick again. I could tell by the way he was walking, but he kept on. I was afraid now, because this was a dark part of the city and there weren't many people on the street. I thought then that I'd made a mistake in giving father the gun. I was going to be spanked when I got home, but I didn't mind.

I wanted to go home, but I didn't dare leave father.

Once he leaned against a light pole as if he was very tired. I was tired too and I didn't blame him, but now I knew that even if I didn't mind leaving father I couldn't get back, because I was lost. Of course I could have found a policeman and asked him how to get home. Mother always told me to be sure and do that, but then I might have to tell how father sneaked out on the policeman in front of our house.

Father didn't seem to notice the car that came around the corner. He was clinging to the lamp post, all bent over, and I knew he was sick again. The car began to move faster and I thought it was going to climb onto the sidewalk and hit father.

So I started to run. I had to wake him up so he could get out of the way. I ran into the road and forgot all about mother telling me never to do that. I guess the man who was driving that car got scared when he saw me because the car twisted around just like my toy auto used to do when one front wheel locked.

Just as it started to twist that way, I heard a gun go off. It was in the car and I saw flame come from the car window. But the car made such a crazy

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twist that the man with the gun must have got awful mad, because he yelled like father yells when he gets mad.

The car went past me and I didn't move at all. I was too scared to move. It stopped and a man got out. He was holding a gun that looked like father's. Father had his back against the lamp post now, and he was holding his gun too.

Father shouted, "Down, Joey! Fall down!"

It was some kind of a game, and I did like father said. I fell down. The guns went off again and the man who got out of the car fell down too. I guess he was in the game just like me. The driver got out and he had a gun, but he

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threw it away and lifted his arms as high as he could get them.

Father still leaned against the lamp post and he had his gun pointed at the driver. Then I heard sirens and I knew policemen were coming. When they got there, I ran to my father and he took me in his arms and squeezed me so tight it hurt me. The policemen put me in a radio car and drove me home. Father went off in another car with two policemen holding his arms, but they didn't take him home.

ALL mother told me, the next day, was that father was sick again and in the hospital. We went there that night and a big policeman was standing outside the door. He was a nice policeman, and he played with me after I went in and kissed father.

Later—I guess it was a couple of weeks—mother took me to a great big room. She said it was called the Academy. I didn't know what Academy meant, but it was awful big and there were a lot of policemen standing in line and not moving or saying a word.

Father came in and when I started to run toward him, mother caught me up in her arms. She was crying a little while a man read from a paper.

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I wanted to ask mother to explain what all that meant, but she was too busy with her handkerchief. Then I saw the man who talked so much step up to father and pin a badge on him. Anyway, it looked like a badge except that it had ribbons on it.

I had to say something. I looked up at mother. "Why did they put that badge on father's uniform when he's got one there already, Mother?"

She didn't answer me. But then, after father came home again, I didn't get spanked either, so that was all right too!



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(Continued from page 7)

plenty surprised on the last page to find out the killer. It's a whopper of a tale!

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Letters From Readers

WE'RE just like everyone else. We like to get letters, and there's a big bag full on hand this time from you readers to please us. Every letter received is either answered personally or acknowledged in this department.

Our first contribution is from an Iowa reader who has an interesting question to ask.

If you purposely frighten someone so that they'll have a heart attack and die, can you be held for murder? This question is to settle a bet, but I won't tell you which way I'm betting.—*Joseph P. Agnes, Iowa Falls, Ia.*

Yes, a killer can be held for murder no

matter what his method or weapon. The important thing is intent.

One thing's certain—**DEAD CERTAIN**, by Stewart Sterling, is certainly one of the best yarns you ever published.—*Arnie Fossiter Smith, Pueblo, Colo.*

We **CERTAINLY** thank you, Arnie, for those kind words.

I have just finished reading the latest issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE** and I think it's tops. Let's have more stories like **MURDER SETS A STAGE**. The only sour story in the issue was a piece titled **NEW YEAR'S PIT-FALL**.—*Tedd Compagna, Croton-On-Hudson, N. Y.*

I like the short stories better than the long ones. Why don't you run all short ones in an issue some time—just for variety?—*Helen Gielgud, Spokane, Wash.*

What do you other readers think of this suggestion?

I like the hotel detective Gil Vine in the story **DEAD CERTAIN**, by Stewart Sterling.—*Joel O'Shea, Jr., Passaic, N. J.*

We hope to have another Gil Vine story soon. Watch for it.

Thanks for all the letters. Keep them coming. We'll print many more in coming issues. Perhaps **YOURS** will be among them. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you all next issue!

—THE EDITOR.

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*C. S., Lucien, Okla.



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*R. T., Prichard, Ala.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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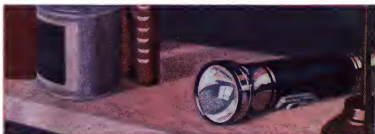
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